

PRABUDDHA BHARATA *or* **AWAKENED INDIA**

**A monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896**



June 2013

Vol. 118, No. 6

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THE ROAD TO WISDOM

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA ON *The Great 'I'*

OUR best work is done, our greatest influence is exerted, when we are without thought of self. All great geniuses know this. Let us open ourselves to the one Divine Actor, and let Him act, and do nothing ourselves. Be perfectly resigned, perfectly unconcerned; then alone can you do any true work. No eyes can see the real forces, we can only see the results. Put out self, lose it, forget it; just let God work, it is His business. We have nothing to do but stand aside and let God work. The more we go away, the more God comes in. Get rid of the little 'I', and let only the great 'I' live.

We are what our thoughts have made us; so take care of what you think. Words are secondary. Thoughts live, they travel far. Each thought we think is tinged with our own character, so that for the pure and holy man, even his jests or abuse will have the twist of his own love and purity and do good.

Desire nothing; think of God and look for no return. It is the desireless who bring results. The begging monks carry religion to every man's door; but they think that they do nothing, they claim nothing, their work is unconsciously done. If they should eat of the tree of knowledge, they would become egoists, and all the good they do would fly away. As soon as we say 'I', we are humbugged all the time; and we call



it 'knowable', but it is only going round and round like a bullock tied to a tree. The Lord has hidden Himself best, and His work is best; so he who hides himself best, accomplishes most. Conquer yourself, and the whole universe is yours.

To give up the world is to forget the ego, to know it not at all – living in the body, but not of it. This rascal ego must be obliterated. Bless men when they revile you. Think how much good they are doing you; they can only hurt themselves. Go where people hate you, let them thrash the ego out of you, and you will get nearer to the Lord.

Those who give themselves up to the Lord do more for the world than all the so-called workers. One man who has purified himself thoroughly accomplishes more than a regiment of preachers. Out of purity and silence comes the word of power.

From *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 7.14–16.



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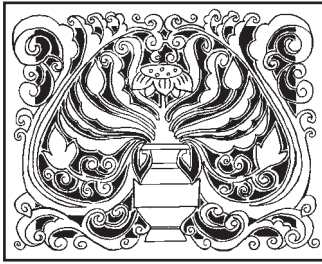
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Contents



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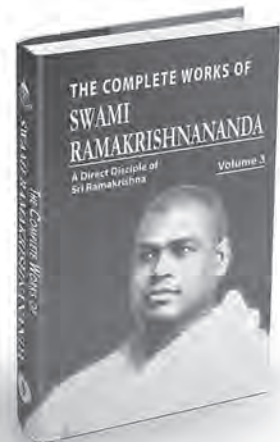
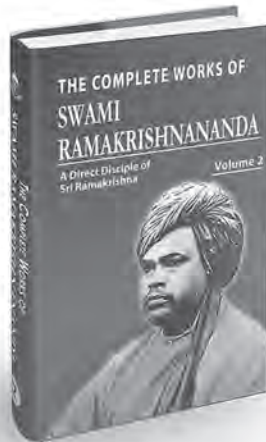
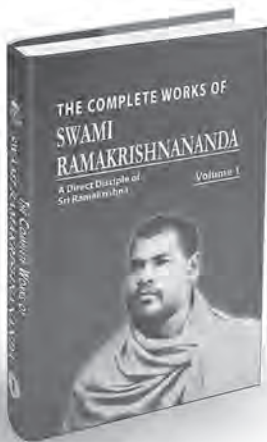
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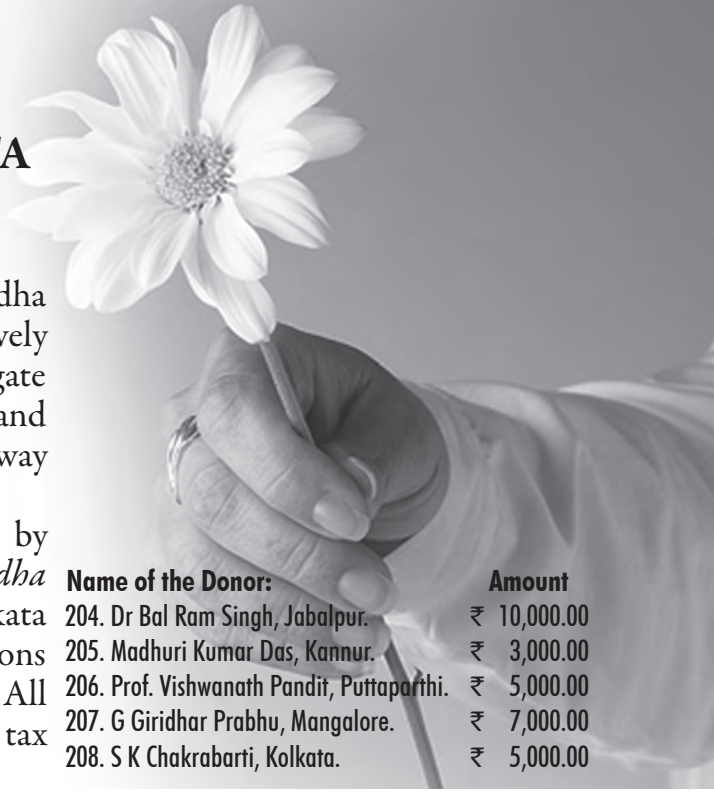


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—A compilation

Today it is absolutely imperative for the country and the world to be informed about Vivekananda's life-giving ideas and contributions. In the last hundred years or more, a great change has come about in the way human beings understand the world and each other. It has been a phenomenon of global dimension, silently working on a subtle plane. If we track the source of this phenomenon, we shall be led to two names: Ramakrishna and Vivekananda.

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The Limitless Being

June 2013
Vol. 118, No. 6

श्रेष्ठो जातस्य रुद्र श्रियासि तवस्तमस्तवसां वज्रबाहो ।
पर्षि णः पारमंहसः स्वस्ति विश्वा अभीती रपसो युयोधि ॥

Chief of all born art thou in glory, O Rudra, armed with the thunderbolt,
mightiest of the mighty; transport us over trouble to well-being, repel thou
from us all assaults of mischief.

(Rig Veda, 2.33.3)

य एको जालवानीशत ईशनीभिः सर्वाल्लोकानीशत ईशनीभिः ।
य एवैक उद्धवे सम्भवे च य एतद् विदुरमृतास्ते भवन्ति ॥

The One who being the possessor of the net (maya), rules through his
(divine) powers, rules over all the worlds through his powers of rulership;
who is verily One—when in association with the divine powers and when
manifested. Those who know this become immortal.

(Shvetashvatara Upanishad, 3.1)

परेण नाकं निहितं गुहायं विभ्राजते यद्यतयो विशन्ति ।
वेदान्तविज्ञानसुनिश्चितार्थाः संन्यासयोगाद्यतयः शुद्धसत्त्वाः ॥
ते ब्रह्मलोकेषु परान्तकाले परामृतात्परिमुच्यन्ति सर्वे ॥

Higher than heaven, seated in the cave (*buddhi*), shining, (which) the self-
controlled attain—the self-controlled, who being of pure minds have well
ascertained the Reality by the knowledge of Vedanta and through sannyasa.
In the sphere of Brahma, at the time of the cosmic dissolution, they all get
liberated from the highest (apparent) immortality of the manifested universe.

(Kaivalya Upanishad, 3)

THIS MONTH

Human aggressiveness and violence against itself and the environment is being eclipsed by a new spiritual culture that is in the offing. This spiritual culture is **The Mother Path**.



The present worship of Shiva has evolved from many indigenous cultures of India over a long period. Subrata Sanyal, who is a chartered engineer and technical and energy auditor residing at Jalpaiguri, West Bengal, writes on **Shiva: A Confluence of Diverse Traditions**.

In London a small **Unpublished Letter of Swami Vivekananda**, written to Reverend Hugh Reginald Haweis, was recently discovered.

Sri Ramakrishna says: 'Women are but so many forms of my Divine Mother.' Ananya Jana, who



completed her MTech from the Indian Institute of Technology, Guwahati, writes about her own experience of **The Power of Addressing Women as 'Ma'**.

One has to pass through numerous stages till one attains true spirituality. **Janaka: Passage through the Final Space** gives us an understanding about the last hurdle before the final step. Indrajit Bandopadhyaya is Assistant Professor of English, Kalayani Mahavidyalaya, Nadia, West Bengal.

The Bhagavadgita is a comprehensive scripture that covers every aspect of life. Dr R Lekshmi, Lecturer in Philosophy, Government College for Women, Thiruvananthapuram, writes on **The Bhagavadgita for Everyday Life**.

While death has been one of the greatest enemies of life, it has been an inspiration for many. Dr P Radharani, Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy, University College, Thiruvananthapuram, writes on **Advaita Vedanta's Method of Conquering Death**.



In the ninth part of **Eternal Words**, Swami Abhutananda speaks on holy association, devotion, sadhana, and steadfastness. The swami's words are translated from *Sat Katha*, published by Udbodhan Office, Kolkata.



In the thirteenth instalment of **Svarajya Siddhi: Attaining Self-dominion** by the eighteenth century Gangadharendra Saraswati, fifteenth pontiff of Kanchi Kamakoti Pitham, Kanchipuram, the different theories of creation, including Advaita Vedanta's, are systematically explained.

EDITORIAL

The Mother Path

HUMANS ARE PART of the family called Hominidae. One of the greatest factors that have made us so different from other hominids is not genes but culture. Humans are cultural beings, and the highest culture that humankind has developed is the spiritual culture. It takes human beings from merely being cultural to spiritual beings!

Humans everywhere seek the fulfilment of different values and capabilities in order to ensure the well-being of their individual and social aspirations. It is obvious that in almost all places these aspirations are thwarted by different forces. This thwarting in other words means exploitation, discrimination, and other forms of oppression. The United Nations Declaration of Human Rights states in its Preamble: 'Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world. Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people.' It is a document that makes one justifiably proud, and most countries are implementing legal processes that guarantee everyone the right to live with dignity and honour. However, the ground reality is different, and there is a lot of exploitation and discrimination. Yet we must not underestimate humankind's capability, which has evolved

through and overcome many difficult situations and circumstances along its history.

There is one pressing problem that needs to be redressed in haste and that is the abuse of women and children. Women, after years of being kept down, are poised to rise. This is obvious by seeing the vast number of them entering every field of work, while yet looking after their homes. For thousands of years women have safeguarded culture, and today they are scripting a new phase of human culture.

Though there are small but consistent differences between males and females, the behavioural differences between genders depend more on social and cultural contexts than on biological or genetic constitutions. The stereotypic aggressive male tendencies are less dependent on biology but more dependent on culture. We are already seeing a change in the roles of women, and the same is going to happen for men. With massive cultural changes taking place all over the world, the future female and male stereotypes will be rebuilt on a higher spiritual basis.

The human species is one of the few that have no internal inhibition about killing members of its own species. In society, which has put controls over this violent behaviour, there is yet a great tendency to hurt others, especially women and children, and to sneakily override these controls at home or when no one is around. This ancient killing instinct gives rise to uncontrollable aggressiveness, pugnacity, and lust and results in mind-numbing rapes and other forms of abuse that shock human conscience.

Sri Ramakrishna says: ‘Women are but so many forms of my Divine Mother. I cannot bear to see them suffer. You are all images of the Mother of the Universe.’ This is a tremendous statement and a great neutralizing factor for male and female chauvinism and aggression. It is only when we can see ourselves as embodying Divinity that we can see others in the same light. Once an old woman following a religious vow of fasting came to see Sri Ramakrishna. ‘The Master at once took down some sugar from a sling and mixing it in a tumbler of Ganges water held it before the old lady saying, “Drink.” She stared at him meaningfully for a while, then drank it without further ado. Then touching her bosom she said, “My heart is cooled, father!”’

If each one of us carries the whole of our long evolutionary history—from crude beginnings through tiny forms, to reptiles and animals—it also means that each one of us contains both the male and the female within. A slight biological difference need not be overemphasized; moreover, as spiritual entities we have no gender, as the Atman is beyond gender. Yet the idea of male and female is so ingrained in the human mind that we also think that such differences will remain with us even after death. Such are the superficial perceptions of the world. The unenlightened are, in their thoughts and actions, invariably motivated by such gender differences. Even religious forms and ceremonies are not free from such wrong perceptions. One example of this is the perception of the Shiva lingam as a phallic symbol—this attitude directs people’s thoughts and behaviour accordingly. The lingam is but a *pratika*, symbol, of Shiva and has nothing to do with sexual imagery. The concept and worship of Shiva as Ardhnanarishvara is important because in this aspect God is worshipped as a deity who is half male and half female.

Sri Ramakrishna teaches: ‘Names and forms

are nothing but the manifestations of the power of Prakriti. Sita said to Hanuman: “My child, in one form I am Sita, in another form I am Rama. In one form I am Indra, in another I am Indrani. In one form I am Brahma, in another, Brahmani. In one form I am Rudra, in another, Rudrani.” Whatever names and forms you see are nothing but the manifestations of the power of Chit-sakti.’ This is the spiritual viewpoint humankind has to take for further development. In the Mahabharata and the Puranas, Janaka, who is praised highly for his detachment, knowledge, and other qualities, had to learn a bitter lesson before becoming the Janaka we all know so well. The bitter lesson came in the form of a Bhairavi who showed him his imperfection—he still kept a distinction between male and female. It was only after he acknowledged and incorporated the feminine self in his male self that he could rise above both to reach the state of a *vijnani*, one with a special knowledge who sees that all is God. The *Isha Upanishad* declares this in clear terms: ‘He who sees all beings in the Atman itself, and the Atman in all beings, feels no hatred by virtue of that (realization).’

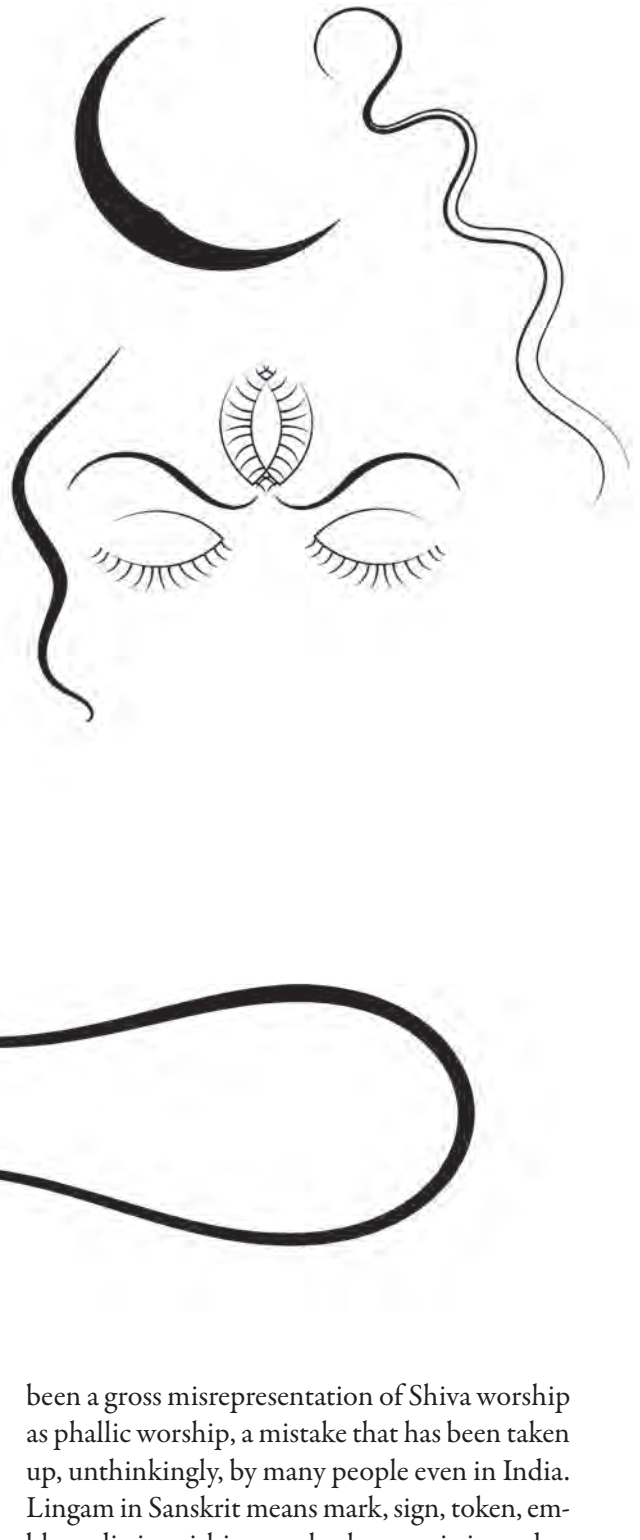
The spiritual culture that is silently growing all over the world, which we may not be fully aware of, is changing humankind psychologically. The future will see an erasing of gender discrimination and oppression of people and will bring in the idea of veneration. Sri Sarada Devi says that the Master had left her behind in order to demonstrate the Motherhood of God. ‘This infinite all-embracing Motherhood of hers spoke so sweetly through every word, every movement, and every act that a mere touch of it melted the hardest heart.’ This is what humanity needs in these times of great stress. This pressing need is supplied by God, who has come as the Holy Mother. This will be the future path of humanity: the Mother path.

Shiva: A Confluence of Diverse Traditions

Subrata Sanyal

SHIVA, KNOWN AS MAHADEVA, Great God, is worshipped all over India and even beyond. He is revered by simple rural folks, brahmanas, bhaktas, yogis, *siddhas*, *kiratas*, indigenous people of the eastern Himalayas, Tibetans, those who speak Dravidian languages, and even gods and goddesses. Shiva has a thousand names, which are recited daily by thousands of people, describing every known aspect of the Godhead. He is omnipotent, yet he is *bhola*, simple, too; he is *vinasha karta*, god of destruction, yet he is *ashutosha*, easily pleased; he is a combination of all the virtues, and yet he is beyond all qualities. Though he is the Supreme Being, he is pleased with the simple offerings of water, *vilva* (aegle marmelos) leaves, or with wild flowers. Anyone can worship him at any time and with anything. How Shiva can combine so many qualities and characteristics is a great wonder.

The origins of Shiva worship are very ancient. The traditions of pre-Vedic and Vedic times have melded into what we now call the cult of Shiva. Unfortunately, in modern times there has



been a gross misrepresentation of Shiva worship as phallic worship, a mistake that has been taken up, unthinkingly, by many people even in India. Lingam in Sanskrit means mark, sign, token, emblem, distinguishing mark, characteristic, and so on. Seeing the lingam one is reminded of Shiva, not of a phallus.

Ancient Beliefs and Practices

The many aboriginal people of India, who still cling to their ancient ways, as well as the refined brahmana cults claim direct lineage from Shiva. Some historians opine that the concept and the worship of Shiva was started by the people of a place most probably called Meluhha by the people of the Harappan civilization—2600–1700 BCE.¹ The most interesting seal found by Sir John H Marshall during the Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro excavations is that of a figure that was identified as Shiva. The figure shows a male deity wearing buffalo horns, seated in a *padmasana*, lotus asana, with hands held straight touching the knees. Subsequent research expressed doubts about Marshall's interpretation.² However, a good number of prehistoric relics resembling lingams are found all over India, including the sites of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro.

All this has led to the simplistic interpretation of phallic worship by many people and scholars, 'but the *linga* may have been in origin no more than just a symbol of Śiva, as the *śalagrama* is of Viṣṇu' (67). Like the Shiva lingams found near the Harappan sites, no such stones have been found in the ancient sites of Lothal and Kalibangan, except circular ones.³ But one should not jump to any conclusion about these, as unidentified stones of the Harappan culture, particularly fire-altars and sacrificial platforms resembling Vedic designs, were discovered in Lothal and Dholavira in Gujarat.

Out of the many races and autochthonous people of India, those belonging to the super-family of languages called Austro-Asiatic deserve special mention. These people derived their concepts of art and craft by observing nature and as usual produced a mythology consisting of many gods and goddesses. Like most tribal people in other parts of the world, their worship also oriented around the sun, the principal deity that

guided day, night, heat, and rain. These people, the ancestors of the Shavaras, Hill Marias, Kol-las, Bhils, and Gonds, used ploughs tipped with a rock after they learnt the art of cultivation. Amazed at the harvests and the fertility of the earth, they contemplated upon nature's mystery and powers. These simple people believed that the sun, through its rays, brought rain and injected it into the soil to increase its fertility.

Over the years the rock-plough became a true representative of the sun, the Purusha; the earth into which the plough penetrated was depicted as Prakriti. The tip of the rock began to be worshipped in place of God in the sky. For a long time this God had no human form. People who cultivated the land wanted to worship a tangible God which they could thank, praise, and propitiate. These early farmers and forest and mountain dwellers spoke of themselves as Har, Hara, Ho, and Horo—which means 'man'. Therefore, the energy of the sun was thought to be manifested through every person, who in turn was responsible for increasing the fertility and the yield of the fields. There is a legend among the Gonds about how Shiva Mahadeva acquired a form out of the rounded stones found in the river Narmada. It is well known that the *bana*-lingam, found in the Narmada river basin, is worshipped as a symbol of Shiva. The legend consists of a conversation between Shiva, without any form, and the supreme God.

There the god *Mahādeva* was ruling from the upper sea to the lower sea. What was *Mahādeva* doing? He was swimming like a rolling stone; he had no hand or feet. He remained like the trunk (of a tree). Then *Mahādeva* performed austerities for twelve months. And the *Bhagawan* came and stood close to *Mahādeva* and called to him, 'Thy devotion is finished, emerge out of water,' he said. 'How shall I emerge? I have no hands, no feet, no eyes.' Then *Mahādeva*

received a Man's form. Thus Man's complete form was made in the luminous world.⁴

It would be unwise to think that the form of Shiva that was worshipped in the early days is the same as the one worshipped today. In the earliest times gods and the goddesses were worshipped through their *pratika*, symbols. In Hinduism one can see that these old forms of worship are still retained and coexist with *pratimas*, images. Some of the different *pratikas* used to worship different deities are, for instance, the *bana*-lingam, for Shiva; the *shalagrama*, stone symbol, for Vishnu; the glowing-red pebbles found in the Narmada, for Ganesha; the rock crystals found in Gujarat and Rajasthan, for Surya; and a lump of crude iron found in the mines of Central India, for Gauri. Hence, the *bana*-lingam was a mere representation of the god meant for rich fertility, good harvest, abundant prey from the jungles, and safer livelihood.

The gods also took on various names, according to the duties which they discharged: Kshetrपाल, protector of the field—the body of the Goddess Earth; Kama Devata, god of love; Grama Devata, protector of the village; and so on. For a long time sacrifice was offered to Surya through the plough-tip smeared with sacrificial blood, which was offered to the soil, satisfying Purusha and Prakriti. In some early hunter-gatherer communities, near the Vindhya mountain range and even in what is now Odisha, people worshipped a vertically placed monolithic stone on a stand as a village deity. This stone was carried along with the people when they moved from one place to other. The tribals of Ho, Munda, and Khorja of the Chota-Nagpur region also follow the tradition of offering worship to a vertically placed stone. In the western districts of West Bengal, adivasis place on the grave of the deceased a vertical stone, which is called *vir-kanr*.

This custom is followed in varying patterns in peninsular India.⁵ The same practice is also found among the Khasis of Meghalaya. They place a vertical stone on the grave of a male, and a horizontal stone on a female's grave. The placing of stones signifies not only the identification of the grave but the presence of God in the graveyard, which paves the way to heaven for the deceased.

Sanskrit literature is replete with references to the *kirata* people, worshippers of Shiva living near Mount Kailas, the sacred abode of Shiva. Though we cannot trace the early stages of how these people began to worship Shiva, most of their practices appear primitive and tell of a long history still to be unravelled.

Dravidian Origins of Shiva Worship

The majority of the *jyotirlingas*, luminous lingams, identified by Acharya Shankara, are located within what were tribal areas. These lingams are still worshipped by the aboriginals as their presiding deities. The *jyotirlinga* of Srisailem in Andhra Pradesh is known as Chenchu Malliah, the god of the Chenchus.⁶ Similarly, Tryambakeshvara and Omkareshvara are identified with local tribal-folks. The Vaidyanath Shiva is the deity of the Shavara people, who also used to worship Jagannath at Puri. The *jyotirlinga* of Somnath in Kathiawad is believed to be the primitive deity of local fisher-folks. Here the diameter of the lingam is more spread than elsewhere and is without any *gouri-patta*, base shaped like a vessel. Apart from being worshipped now through Vedic rituals, all these lingams are also worshipped by the local adivasis according to their own traditions. The shape and size of the deity did not reflect phallic worship, as wrongly imagined.

The Dravidians have an ancient tradition of Shiva worship. It is a popular notion that most of the present concepts of Shiva are derived from Dravidian traditions. There are millions of

pastoral people in western Pakistan who speak a Dravidian language, but who have been linguistically isolated for thousands of years from the rest. This made some scholars tentatively presume that the Indus Valley civilization was planned and constructed by the Mediterranean Dravidian people. And the seal with a figure in *padmasana* wearing buffalo horns and surrounded by animals is presumed to be the figure of *pashupatinath*, the Lord of the beasts—Shiva. Though this theory is controversial,⁷ it is undoubtedly true that the culture of Shiva worship was nurtured by Dravidians in the ancient past, and that a number of autochthonous cults prevailing in different parts of the region ultimately were submerged in the present-day Shiva worship.

The Murugan cult was also prevalent among the major tribal groups of South India. The totem worshippers called Nagas, which inhabited large areas to the south of the Vindhya ranges, were the chief followers of Murugan, probably through his previous name of Sheyon—the god with the red complexion. The oldest Tamil hymns refer to him as the deity of the tribes of the hunters of the hilly regions and as Velan, who carries the *vel*, spear. Ancient Tamil Sangam literature depicted him as the victorious ‘red god’, who bears the gem-like peacock flag and rides a peacock or an elephant. By the sixth century CE the Murugan or Skanda cult shed its association with the earlier indigenous forms of worship of the hill-tribes—the Veddas and the Kuravas—and became incorporated in the Shaiva Agamas, scriptures. But still, in the scripture *Swamimalai*, Skanda is worshipped as Shivaguru or Swaminatha, because he expounded to Shiva the significance of the *pranava*, Om.⁸

All these traditions imply that the cult of Shiva followed aboriginal rites and rituals of Murugan or Skanda, and that Skanda was regarded as the guru of Shiva. Dr Nihar Ranjan Roy infers

that the red-complexioned deity of the marshy-hilly regions has exclusively been the deity of the Dravidian-speaking people, known as Shivan, meaning red or blood, and Shembu, meaning copper; both of them were later assimilated into the Vedic god Rudra, which led to Shivan becoming Shiva and Shembu becoming Shambhu.⁹ Dr Roy indicates that the Murugan cult, which ultimately mixed with the Agama cult of Shaivism, was transformed into the Shiva cult of South India.

Parallel to the prevalent worship of Murugan among the hill tribes of South India was the worship of *grama-devatas*, village deities, and *griha-devatas*, household deities, through aboriginal rituals and emblems. This practice still continues, though it varies from village to village. A typical example is found at Achant, a village in the Guntur district of Andhra Pradesh. Here Shiva is worshipped as a lingam that has the form of a woman’s breast. The Shiva lingam has no pedestal but emanates directly from the ground. It is said that the remaining part of the dancing girl, with the yoni on which the lingam rests, lies buried in the ground. This lingam has three natural holes to suggest the three eyes of the Lord.¹⁰

Rudra is an important deity from among the many Vedic gods and goddesses. Rudra’s other names, first mentioned in the *Shatapatha Brahmana*, are Sharva, Pashupati, Ugra, Bhava, Ishvara, Mahadeva, Bhishma, Ishana, Yuvana, and Kala.¹¹ Though Rudra is mentioned a number of times in the Rig Veda, the first reference to Shiva, as he is now known, is this: ‘To him the strong, great, tawny fair-complexioned I utter forth a mighty hymn of praise.’¹² ‘Rudra’ means ‘roaring’ or ‘crying’. He was referred to in some hymns as the father of the gods called Maruts. In the Yajur Veda we find Rudra killing the asuras and destroying the *tripura*, their three cities. The supremacy of Shiva is expounded in the *Shvetashvatara Upanishad*: ‘Rudra, who is the origin and

the source of the divine powers of the gods, who is the protector of the universe, the great seer, saw Hiranyagarbha as he was being born. May he endow us with good understanding.’¹³ In this Upanishad Rudra is equated with Shiva (4.14). He is also spoken of as the Purusha, in whom the created world dissolves, and so on (5.3). In spite of such astounding verses regarding Shiva in this Upanishad, which is part of the Krishna Yajur Veda, nothing is mentioned about ritual worship. Only Shiva’s absolute aspect is emphasized here.

The Atharva Veda contains the ‘Rudra Suktam’, which describes his deeds and qualities, and also speaks of him as Sharva, Pashupati, Ugra, Bhava, Isha, and so on.¹⁴ One of the most famous Vedic hymns is the ‘Rudra Prashna’, found in the Krishna Yajur Veda. This long Sukta, chanted daily by thousands of people, is a comprehensive

praise of Rudra-Shiva. All his aspects and names are enumerated in powerful and sublime terms.

The theology of Kashmir Shaivism contributed heavily to the mainstream Shiva philosophies during the eighth and ninth centuries, and even later. It superseded the dualistic and popular Shaiva Siddhanta school. Kashmir Shaivism was widespread till about the twelfth century and survives today in a few pockets of India. Kashmir Shaivism is also called Trika, triad, because it consists of three energies, or goddesses—*para*, *para-apara*, and *apara*—or three modes of knowledge—Shiva, Shakti, and *nara*, human, or *anu*, atom. The system has two main schools called Spanda, cosmic vibration, and Pratyabhijna, spontaneous recognition of the Reality. The philosophy comes close to Acharya Shankara’s Advaita philosophy, as it

Prince Subuddhi (a heroic ancestor of the Rathore dynasty) meets Shiva in the Forest of Illusion, by Amardas Bhatti, 1830



shows that the ultimate Reality is non-dual. Through Kashmir Shaivism a new philosophical era was ushered in about the manifestation of Shiva-Shakti, which later was a catalyst in forming numerous Shaiva and Shakta cults, leading to the development of various tantras.

Swami Vivekananda, a great devotee of Shiva, clarified the understanding of Shiva worship at the Paris Congress of Religions of 1900:

The worship of the Shiva-Linga had originated from the famous hymn in the Atharva-Veda Samhita sung in the praise of the Yupa-Stambha, the sacrificial post. In that hymn a description is found of the beginningless and endless Stambha or Skambha, and it is shown that the said Skambha is put in place of the eternal Brahman. As afterwards the Yajna (sacrificial) fire, its smoke, ashes, and flames, the Soma plant, and the ox that used to carry on its back the wood for the Vedic sacrifice gave place to the conceptions of the brightness of the Shiva's body, his tawny matted-hair, his blue throat, and the riding on the bull of the Shiva, and so on—just so, the Yupa-Skambha gave place in time to the Shiva-Linga, and was deified to the high Devahood of Shri Shankara.¹⁵

Sufficient archaeological and other research has been conducted on ancient art and artefacts in India in order to establish the ancient worship of Shiva. Besides, one can also trace how that simple worship evolved into a universal worship of a universal God. It is also being firmly established that the Shiva traditions we see today are a confederation and confluence of various cults, cultures, practices, and beliefs spread across the country from ancient times. Swamiji gives a graphic account of Shiva's influence in India and the world in one of his prolific writings, 'The East and the West':

Here is the selfsame Old Shiva seated as before, the bloody Mother Kali, worshipped with the selfsame paraphernalia, the pastoral Shepherd

of Love, Shri Krishna, playing on His flute. Once this Old Shiva, riding on His bull and taboring on His Damaru travelled from India, on the one side, to Sumatra, Borneo, Celebes, Australia, as far as the shores of America, and on the other side, this Old Shiva battened His bull in Tibet, China, Japan, and as far up as Siberia, and is still doing the same. The Mother Kali is still exacting Her worship even in China and Japan. ... Behold the Himalayas! There to the north is Kailas, the main abode of the Old Shiva. That throne the ten-headed, twenty-armed, mighty Ravana could not shake. ... Here in India will ever be the Old Shiva taboring on his Damaru, the Mother Kali worshipped with animal sacrifice, and the lovable Shri Krishna playing on His flute (5.445).



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Unpublished Letter of Swami Vivekananda

Swamiji's original letter was found with the papers of Reverend Haweis's daughter Ms Hugolin Haweis. Reverend Hugh Reginald Haweis was the curate of the St James Church, Marlebone, London, and also the delegate of the Anglican Church to the Parliament of Religions at Chicago in 1893, where he probably first met Swamiji.

*Reverend Haweis met Swamiji again at London in 1896 and attended his lectures. The letter refers to Haweis's book *The Dead Pulpit*, which was published in 1896. A copy of it was probably sent as a gift to Swamiji.*

Mr Carl Aronsson of London informed the authorities of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission about Swamiji's letter. A formal request for the original has been made. This is a photocopy of Swamiji's letter Mr Aronsson has sent.



63 St. George's Road
London, SW
July 17th

Dear friend – Many many thanks for your very instructive book. I have been going through a few pages already and have already learned a few great and beautiful lessons. One specially where you insist that the life of Lord Jesus is the only commentary to His teachings and wherever the teachings as recorded contradict the life we are sure that the record was wrong. That is wonderful insight and keen reason. I am sure to read the book several times over and learn many a lesson. May the Lord speak through you long – for the world needs and never more than now inspired souls like yourself.

Ever yours in the Lord
Vivekananda



53 St George's Road
London S.W.
July 17th

Dear friend - Many many
thanks for your very instructive books.
I have been going through a few
hours already and have already
learned a few great & beautiful lessons.
One specially where you insist that
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through you long - for the world needs
and needs more than ever inspired souls
like ~~you~~ Jesus in the Lord
Vivekananda

The Power of Addressing Women as ‘Ma’

Ananya Jana

AFTER WATCHING the first episode of the TV presentation *Satyameva Jayate*, on 6 May 2012, directed and produced by Aamir Khan, I went into a pensive mood. So many thoughts crowded my head. First of all, hats off to Mr Khan and his team for the role they have taken up. Every Indian should watch the whole series of fourteen episodes.¹ No amount of praise can exaggerate the goodness of these souls. The programme reminded me of Swami Vivekananda, the great prophet, and the views he held about women when the word ‘foeticide’ was not in vogue: ‘All nations have attained greatness by paying proper respect to women. That country and that nation which do not respect women have never become great, nor will ever be in future.’² Yes, ‘respect’ is the word that seems to be fading fast into oblivion.

There was a time when older people met young girls and used to address them in this way: ‘How are you, little mother?’ Generally they used one more line if the mother of this girl was found nearby: ‘When are you going to marry your daughter off?’ I heard such things when I was ten or eleven years old. Obviously I did not like the second remark, and as for the first one, I was too young at that time to grasp its full implication—it was just another form of address used by old folks. One of my neighbours also used to address girls as ‘mother’.

Many years have passed since then. I grew up, went to school, and in the process learnt about the annoyances girls have to put up with while travelling. I became so conscious of my existence while travelling that sometimes I even nudged

or pushed males who stood beside me so that I could occupy twice the place of my size—since I am quite fat you can imagine the dismay of the passengers! I wanted to keep myself at a safe distance, and it had almost become a reflex action with me. Through this attitude I have sometimes hurt innocent people, but I did not want to risk my honour at any cost. One day, however, it so happened that an elderly man was making his way through the crowded bus, while I was standing near the exit. As I was preparing to make myself as safe as I could, I suddenly heard a voice: ‘Can you move a bit, ma?’ I was so shocked; it was the first time in my life that I felt no need to use any defence mechanisms. This is the magic that the word ‘ma’ carries. I choked, ashamed of myself; I stood motionless as if I had become a serpent quieted by the flute of a snake charmer. After that day I wished someone else would call me by that name. Fortunately a lady in my neighbourhood still calls me that and so do two of my uncles.

That event made me realize for the first time the importance of those words, their strength, the respect and affection hidden in those few words. But nowadays they are hardly ever heard anywhere, it seems. Rather it is a trend to call girls ‘hot’, ‘sexy’, ‘chic’, and the like; and even worse, the girls seem to enjoy it. Well, I do not blame them, because most of these children have never heard such an honourable and respectful way of addressing them as the one shown by that man in the bus; and even if they hear something similar today, they think it outdated.

The word ‘ma’ is so beautiful; it is associated with so much purity, sacrifice, love, affection,

and one-pointed devotion towards the child. It is a word that can light the hearts of both the caller and the called, just as Shakespeare said:

The quality of mercy is not strain'd,
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath: it is twice blest;
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.³

Sri Ramakrishna was merged in the mother-child relationship throughout his life. The word 'ma' used to bring out the Divine Mother in him. Such is the power of that word. If it can bring divine joy to our Master, can this word not bring purity in this mundane world of ours, can it not put an end to all the evils done against women, the main cause of which is disrespect towards them? Addressing a woman as 'ma' is, to me, the most beautiful way of calling a woman. When I hear this, I feel my soul elevating to a higher level; it is giving me the power to defend the honour and purity associated with it, at any cost. It is making me take a vow just as Rabindranath Tagore did:

Life of my life, I shall ever try
to keep my body pure,
Knowing that thy living touch
is upon all my limbs.
I shall ever try to keep all untruths
out from my thoughts,
knowing that thou art that truth
which has kindled
the light of reason in my mind.
I shall ever try to drive
all evils away from my heart
and keep my love in flower, knowing that
thou hast thy seat in the inmost shrine
of my heart.
And it shall be my endeavour
to reveal thee in my actions,
knowing it is thy power
gives me strength to act.⁴

Let me say something else; the word 'ma' seems to be a gift carrying the power of all the

sacrifices done, all the love showered upon, all the dedication offered to children by all the mothers of the world. 'Ma', the word is more respectable than the word 'respect' itself. Sri Ramakrishna used to say that the mother-child relationship is very pure and that establishing this kind of relationship with God is very easy and conducive to sadhana. Vivekananda declared that the Western ideal of womanhood is the wife, while the Eastern ideal is the mother. This is one of the privileges that we have inherited by being born in the holy land of India, a privilege that anyone in the world can also enjoy by adhering to this powerful word 'ma', which can fill our planet with light and warmth.

I wonder what would happen if every man was capable of seeing women, beyond his wife, sister, and mother, as his own mother, as Vivekananda had suggested long ago? At least half the evils of the world would simply vanish. And, why only men? Women also have to remember their greatest identity, an identity that nothing in the world should take away, an identity bestowed upon them by nature, which comes at birth and goes only at death, if it goes at all. If a man is not married, he may never become a father, but a woman can never part with her motherly nature. Such an indivisible quality is this motherhood. It may be temporarily clouded by emotions, but it can never be completely erased from her character. It is such a powerful gift of nature that even animals cannot keep it at bay, what to say of humans?

Have we debased ourselves so much that we cannot address women as 'mother'? And even if we have, shall we not try to redeem ourselves? Vivekananda held tremendous respect for both his earthly mother and the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi. Once he said: 'I am indebted to my mother for the efflorescence of my knowledge.'⁵ The Holy Mother had such motherly love and compassion for the whole of humanity

that Swamiji expressed: 'To me, Mother's grace is a hundred thousand times more valuable than Father's' (1.547).

It is time we return to addressing our girls as 'ma', the only name that never gets outdated. You may ask, can a simple way of addressing women really change anything? Yes, little drops of water make a mighty ocean. Every girl, whether married or not, has to be aware of this wonderful nature of hers, because if she does not think of herself in that way, no one else will. We can try to inculcate this in our young girls by associating 'ma' with their names. And equally important is to teach our boys the good that will come to their lives if they address women as 'ma'. This is a task we should start at home. If evil has the power to go viral by mere contact, then good has still more power to become manifest, as goodness is the essential nature of the human being.

There is a song in Bengali, sung in the Ramakrishna Mission, which has these two lines: '*Ma nam sekhabe sobe / Ma hoe esecho bhobe*'—To teach the world the name Ma / You have descended upon earth in the form of Ma. Let us realize the magic of this word, which will surely come to our rescue.

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Mother,
by Priya Pariyani

Janaka: The Passage through the Final Space

Indrajit Bandopadhyaya

KING JANAKA IS mentioned several times in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. This is not surprising, as Janaka is often mentioned in different scriptures and other ancient literature as well. Janaka is an ideal householder who has attained the highest knowledge, just as Shuka is an ideal *paramahansa* sannyasin. Swami Vivekananda says that Janaka ‘was backed by Kshatriya prowess as well as spiritual power.’¹

From the many Janaka stories in the *Gospel*, three, with slight variations, are found in the Mahabharata: A husband-wife conversation with king Janaka as the context, which is parallel to a Mahabharata’s dialogue between King Janaka and his queen;² Sri Ramakrishna’s Janaka-Bhairavi reference, found as the Janaka-Sulabha incident (12.308); and Sri Ramakrishna’s oft repeated meeting between Janaka and Shuka, corresponding to the remarkable Janaka-Shuka story (12.312–13).

King Janaka of Mithila is Sita’s illustrious father, as found in Valmiki’s Ramayana and many other Puranas. He is learned, wise, and rules a cosmopolitan kingdom. Mithila excelled, culturally and politically, many regional powers and was a seat of Vedic learning and debates. The great and sublime debates between Yajna-alkya and other Vedic scholars found in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* take place in Janaka’s palace.

We find Janaka mentioned in Vedic literature, in the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, and in many Puranas. It is obvious that there were many

Janakas, not one. One Janaka could not have been in different phases of Indian history, but the cultural memory of Indians seems to have merged all of them into one.

According to the *Vishnu Purana*, the twenty-first Janaka was Siradhvaja, who found Sita while ploughing the fields.³ This shows that Janaka is a title, like Vyasa and Indra, and not any individual name. In the Mahabharata the Janakas in different stories are different persons—names mentioned in some cases—belonging to different eras. The placing of so many stories in the ‘Shanti Parva’ alone, and Yudhishtira’s enthusiastic listening to them, suggest that the ideal role model for a householder must be Janaka. According to the *Devi Bhagavata*, Mithila, or Mithilapuri, was the city founded by Mithi Janaka, son of King Nimi. The dynasty founded by him was called Videha, because of a particular curse by the rishi Vashishta on Nimi, which killed him. Thereafter, all the subsequent kings took the title of Janaka Videha.⁴

From a different standpoint, there must have been an evolution in the concept of Janaka Videha as well as the person himself. Sri Ramakrishna says: ‘One cannot become a King Janaka all of a sudden. Janaka at first practised much austerity in solitude.’⁵ Looking at the three narratives of the *Gospel* mentioned above, one can arrange them for showing the spiritual evolution of a person. Spiritual evolution involves at least three steps: the immature phase, which Sri Ramakrishna calls *kacha ami*, raw ‘I’; the

transition phase, in which struggles predominate in a sadhaka's life; and the mature phase, *paka ami*, ripe 'I'.

A Husband-Wife Conversation

This story can be counted as Janaka's narrative, because Sri Ramakrishna narrates it in that context:

Live in the world but, in order to realize God, hold fast to His Lotus Feet with one hand and with the other do your duties. When you get a respite from your duties, cling to God's Lotus Feet with both hands—live in solitude and meditate on Him and serve Him ceaselessly.

Sub-judge (*joyously*): Sir, these are very beautiful words indeed. Of course one must practise spiritual discipline in solitude. But we forget all about it. We think we have become King Janaka outright! (*The Master and the devotees laugh.*) I feel very happy and peaceful even to hear that there is no need to give up the world and that God can be realized from home as well.

Master: Why should you give up the world? Since you must fight, it is wise for you to fight from a fort. You must fight against your sense-organs, against your hunger and thirst. Therefore you will be wise to face the battle from the world. ... A man once said to his wife, 'I am going to leave the world.' She was a sensible woman. She said: 'Why should you wander about? If you don't have to knock at ten doors for your stomach's sake, go. But if that is the case, then better live in this one place' (627).

The Mahabharata relates an 'old story': a discourse between Janaka and his queen. Janaka abandoned his kingdom to lead the life of a sannyasin after casting away all his wealth, children, and wives. He shaved his head and lived by begging or foraging for his food. The queen, in sorrow and wrath, told him with great firmness: 'Why has thou adopted a life of mendicancy, abandoning thy kingdom full of wealth

and corn? A handful of fallen barley cannot be proper for thee. Thy resolution tallies not with thy acts. ... O King, wilt thou succeed in gratifying thy guests, gods, *Rishis*, and *Pitris*. ... Thou wert before this, the supporter of thousands of Brahmanas versed in the three Vedas and many more besides. How canst thou desire to beg of them thy own food today?'⁶ Then Janaka's wife said that he would just be stepping out of one power system to enter another. She reminded him that so many people and other lower beings depend and pin their hopes on the king, and his leaving to become a sannyasin will dash all their hopes. He would be committing not only a grave mistake but a grave sin in abandoning his duties, and so on and so forth. The whole section is devoted to the queen giving him reasons for not leaving the world and to correctly ascertain his duties. She said that without being a true *mukta-bandhana*, free from bondages, he is a mere *dharma-dhvaja*, who wears external signs of renunciation. This is akin to what Sri Ramakrishna regards as *markata-vairagya*, monkey renunciation.

The Janaka-Bhairavi Incident

Sri Ramakrishna says that it is possible to attain spirituality while being a householder, though it is extremely difficult. He regards Janaka, who achieved that, because he entered the world after attaining knowledge. Yet Sri Ramakrishna warns that 'a householder jnani has reasons to fear,'⁷ and that even a detached householder has to be careful. He gives this example: 'Once a bhairavi [female ascetic] came to King Janaka's court. At the sight of the woman, the king bent his head and cast his eyes to the ground. At this the bhairavi said, "O Janaka, even now you are afraid of a woman!" Through Perfect Knowledge a man becomes like a child five years old; he does not know the distinction between a man and a woman' (ibid.).

Sri Ramakrishna points out the vulnerability of even *sattva guna* when he says: 'If you constantly live in a room full of soot, you are sure to soil your body, be it ever so little, no matter how clever you may be' (ibid.). He regards the three *gunas*—*sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*—as robbers 'for they rob man of all his treasures and make him forget his true nature' (218). Elsewhere he refers to the male vulnerability before the female seductive power and points to hidden sensuality in the male psyche: 'The company of a young woman evokes lust even in a lustless man' (387).

When the Bhairavi said: 'O Janaka, even now you are afraid of a woman!' one is reminded of what Swami Brahmananda says: 'Many people think that it is enough not to look at the face of a woman. But what will you gain merely by turning your eyes to the ground at the sight of a woman? Narendra [Swami Vivekananda] said: "Woman exists for a man as long as he has lust. Free from lust, one sees no difference between man and woman"' (995). The Bhairavi's role in Janaka's life has to be crucial, because without being aware of this hidden sensuality, Janaka could not have overcome his spiritual obstacles and attain the state of pure *sattva*.

Sri Ramakrishna's Janaka bends his head down on seeing the Bhairavi, but Vyasa's Janaka does not look down. Janaka and Sulabha make eye contact, while Janaka reveals his attachment by his visual delight at Sulabha's physical beauty.⁸ This beauty is actually a guise she has taken with the help of her yogic powers to examine whether Janaka has indeed achieved the state of a *mukta*, liberated one. (12.308.8–11). Having noticed and sensed the king's *bhava*, state of mind, she doubts his spiritual status (12.308.16). Sulabha, who was adept to yoga, now enters Janaka's *sattva* with her *sattva* (ibid.). 'She and Janaka were thus in the same body when they carried on the

discussion. After remaining in Janaka's body for a day, she left the palace.'⁹

Indeed, in Janaka occurs what Sri Ramakrishna mentions as '*bhaver ghare chori*, theft in the chamber of the heart'¹⁰ when he approved Sulabha's *bhava* to join his *bhava*,¹¹ though Janaka calls it *dharmasamskara*, religious cleansing (12.308.62). Finally, Janaka becomes aware of the vulnerability of *sattva* and *bhava*, and learns from Sulabha to be a *kshetrajna*, knower of the field, in which both *sattva* and *bhava* and the other *gunas* inhere (12.308.105). Janaka then goes beyond the bondage of three *gunas* as suggested by the next Janaka-Shuka story.

The Janaka-Shuka Story

Sri Ramakrishna narrates the Janaka-Shuka story in the context of the relation between a guru and a disciple before and after the disciple attains real jnana. 'Once Shukadeva went to Janaka to be instructed in the Knowledge of Brahman. Janaka said, "First give me my fee." "But", said Shukadeva, "why should I give you the fee before receiving the instruction?" Janaka laughed and said: "Will you be conscious of guru and disciple after attaining Brahmajnana? That is why I asked you to give me the fee first."¹²

Swamiji, in his inimitable style, relates this Mahabharata story¹³ of how Veda Vyasa, after instructing his son Shuka in the knowledge of Brahman, sent him to be tested by King Janaka: 'The king knew that Vyasa's son was coming to him to learn wisdom: so he made certain arrangements beforehand.'¹⁴ Janaka, putting him through some rigorous tests for many days and in different ways, found the disciple perfect. He then told Shuka: 'What your father has taught you, and what you have learned yourself, I can only repeat. You have known the Truth; go home' (ibid.).



Sage Ashtavakra and King Janaka

Evolution by Stages

As we have seen, these stories show an evolution in the concept of Janaka. The story of the Bhairavi is crucial to understanding a sadhaka's spiritual development and central to all of Janaka narratives. Scholars did not give the importance it deserves and have also missed to take note of the word *antarala*, which occurs only twice in the whole of Mahabharata. Sulabha, the Bhairavi, tells Janaka: 'You have fallen away from the householder pattern of life without having reached moksha, which is so hard to understand; you exist between these two [*ubhayor-antarale cha*], babbling about moksha.'¹⁵ This English translation of *antarala*, existing between two (states), falls short of the significance of the word. *Antarala* can be properly represented through the imagery of a temple's architecture. The word denotes the space between the connective vestibule between the *mandapa*, outer

pillared pavilion, and the *garbhagriha*, sanctum sanctorum. One must pass through this *antarala* to reach the Deity.

King Janaka boasts of his high spiritual state, until Sulabha helps him find out that he has not yet gone beyond gender consciousness and nourishes a hidden desire for women. Sulabha points out Janaka's deficiency in understanding the true meaning of moksha. The story ends with Sulabha declaring that she would stay in Janaka's *sharira-pura*, city of the body. Janaka's silence meant acquiescence (12.308.191). Sri Ramakrishna's Janaka too remains silent after the Bhairavi points out his hidden sensuality.

However, Sri Ramakrishna also speaks of Janaka's evolution: 'On account of his detachment from the world Janaka was also known as the "Videha", that is, one free from consciousness of the body. Though living in the world, he moved about as a jivanmukta, a free soul living in a body. But for most people freedom from body-consciousness is something very far off. Intense spiritual discipline is necessary.'¹⁶ After crossing the dreaded *antarala*, Janaka finally evolves to qualify as Shuka's teacher—the *jivanmukta* becoming the teacher of the *nitya-siddha*, ever perfect. From an *antarala* state in which Janaka is 'neither here nor there', to become Shuka's worthy teacher! Janaka is now 'both here and there', taking in both the *nitya*, eternal, and the *lila*, relative. Such is Janaka's spiritual evolution. By passing through the *antarala* Janaka finally reaches his Self, like a devotee's passage to the sanctum sanctorum.

There is also a hint of tantra-yoga in the Janaka-Sulabha story, which is further confirmed

when Sri Ramakrishna says: 'King Janaka used to give instruction about Brahmajnana from the fifth plane. Sometimes he dwelt on the fifth plane, and sometimes on the sixth' (245). Thus passing through the *antarala* can also refer to the kundalini-shakti passing the fourth chakra to reach the fifth, and further towards the sixth chakra to reach the seventh, the *sahasrara*, on the top of the head. The meeting and union between Janaka and Sulabha can be an allegory for the rise of the kundalini. Another significant meaning of the *antarala* is also *antaransha*, the space between the shoulders, the breast, in which the fourth chakra, the *anahata*, is established.

The fifth chakra is the *vishuddha* at the throat. This chakra has sixteen petals and signifies *sattva guna*. Sulabha enters Janaka's subtle body through *sattva* and establishes connection with Janaka's *bhava* with a sattvic motive. Her eyes are compared to a lotus, to which nothing gets attached; Janaka is also known for his non-attachment. Both Sulabha and Janaka engage in communication through speech and discuss about independence. Sri Ramakrishna says: 'When the mind rises to the fifth plane, the aspirant wants to hear only about God. This is the Visuddha centre of Yoga. The sixth plane and the centre known by the yogi as Ajna are one and the same' (ibid.).

Between the *vishuddha* chakra and the higher *ajna* chakra is a secret chakra called the *lalana*, signifying female energy, which is near the palate. This chakra becomes active only after the kundalini is awakened. When the kundalini reaches the *lalana* chakra, sweet nectar starts dripping on the tongue.¹⁷ The twelve red or white petals of the *lalana* chakra correspond to the attitudes of respect, contentment, offense, self-control, pride, affection, sorrow, depression, purity, dissatisfaction, honour, and anxiety. The red circular moon inside the region acts as a reservoir for nectar.

Again the resemblance is quite evident: Sulabha is *lalana*, feminine Shakti; Janaka at first thinks her to be wanton, with magical powers, but then realizes his mistake. Sulabha speaks through *vak*, speech, which is Sarasvati and resides on the tongue. Janaka regards their union as nectar. Sulabha enters Janaka's *sattva*, with a sattvic motive, but her act is aggressive like *rajas*, the red *guna*. Sulabha indeed brings nectar to Janaka through *vak*.

The sixth chakra is the *ajna*, located between the eyebrows—the third eye of Shiva. It has the shape of a white lotus with two petals. In the centre of this lotus is a white inverted triangle called yoni, within which is the lingam called *itara*, the other. The *itara* lingam is Shiva. This lingam and the downward pointing white triangle symbolize the union between Shiva and Shakti and the *ardhanarishvara*, masculine-feminine balance.

The Puranic story of Shiva's incinerating the god of lust with his third eye is an allegory that lust can be conquered with the *ajna* chakra. Further, Shiva as Ardhanarishvara suggests that the *ajna* chakra is activated by the masculine-feminine balance in the Self.

The union between Janaka and Sulabha at the *sattva* and *bhava* level is, therefore, the allegory of unity of the *vishuddha* and *lalana* chakras. It is after this union that Janaka gains authority to become a world teacher. What other proof of Janaka's worthiness as a guru is there when he taught Shuka himself!

More Significances of the Antarala

The Mahabharata does not show Janaka as *anandamaya*, full of bliss, but Sri Ramakrishna does so. He used to sing a song that has a line depicting Janaka drinking milk from a 'brimming cup' (139). He also says: 'Janaka was a great hero, he fenced with two swords, the one of

knowledge and the other of work' (857). Janaka is a *vijnani* because he has actually drunk milk and has become healthy. Milk is a metaphor used by Sri Ramakrishna to signify knowledge: 'He who has merely heard of milk is "ignorant". He who has seen milk has "knowledge". But he who has drunk milk and been strengthened by it has attained vijnana' (404). 'What is vijnana? It is knowing God in a special way' (288).

Janaka as *anandamaya* and the Mahabharata's portrayal of him passing through the *antarala* may be interpreted as Janaka's transcending the lower *koshas*, sheaths, to the higher ones. Sulabha helps Janaka overcome the obstacles of the *annamaya* and *pranamaya koshas*, food and life sheaths, and move on towards the *manomaya* and *vijnana-maya koshas*, mind and intelligence sheaths. He then intuits the Reality behind all sheaths.




Ardhanarishvara

For passing through the *antarala* of *manomaya* and *vijnanamaya*, it is essential to realize the true and subtle nature of dharma and for man and woman to acknowledge the spiritual or evolutionary nature of each other. Only on transcending this stage can one attain moksha. Sulabha deconstructs Janaka's illusion and delusions and helps him connect with the internal and external reality.¹⁸ She also establishes him firmly in karma yoga, with an expanded vision of Shakti that sees the Self in others and others in the Self. Sri Ramakrishna also says that Janaka performed duties in the spirit of karma yoga. Sulabha then suggests that Janaka should continue his kingly duties because without governance there is no dharma, and without dharma there is no moksha (12.308.159).

The fact that Sulabha enters Janaka through his *bhava*, and then Janaka approves of Sulabha's *bhava* together with his to finally accept her presence in his *sharira-pura*, is not only mystical but also psycho-spiritual. Its significance can be understood in the light of Sri Ramakrishna's sayings on the essentiality of incorporating the feminine in the male psyche. Sri Ramakrishna speaks of the *koshas*, and in that context he mentions Swami Dayananda: 'Do you know what this state is like? Dayananda described it by saying, "Come into the inner apartments and shut the door." Anyone and everyone cannot enter that part of the house.'¹⁹

Sri Ramakrishna's use of the word *ashraya*, refuge, is also significant. Janaka feels that Sulabha has taken *ashraya* in his old Self,²⁰ and Sulabha tells Janaka to take shelter in her *bhava* (12.308.190). Since a *vijnani* must be beyond the pairs of opposites, beyond gender consciousness, it implies that his feminine-self must be in balance with his masculine-self.

Sulabha's residing in Janaka's *sharira-pura* is actually the enlightened *buddhi* residing in his self, because *buddhi* is the feminine principle

(12.246.9). The Bhagavadgita calls us to take refuge in it: *buddhau sharanam-anviccha*.²¹ It is with the *sulabha*, easy to attain, *buddhi* that Janaka passes through the *antarala* to move on to become a *vijnani*. To Sri Ramakrishna bhakti is feminine and jnana is masculine; bhakti can easily move in the inner apartments, unlike jnana. Since Sulabha enters Janaka's 'inner apartment', both in his palace and his *sharira-pura*, in the light of Sri Ramakrishna's wisdom she is bhakti. Janaka must admit her in to complete his jnana, which becomes jnana-bhakti and is truly *vijnana*. 

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The Bhagavadgita for Everyday Life

Dr R Lekshmi

THE BHAGAVADGITA, which means the ‘Song of the Divine’, is a scripture that teaches us about life. It is a gospel with an optimistic outlook, spiritual heroism, and superb metaphysics. The message of the Gita is universal in its approach; it is for everyone and for all times. In times of crisis, when our minds are full of doubts and scattered by the conflict of duties, we can always turn to the Gita for light and guidance.

That the Gita offers certain fundamental teachings related to people’s daily life is clear from the stage in which Vyasa, the author, set those teachings: a battlefield. Sri Krishna, the Lord, teaches Arjuna, who represents the common person. The battlefield is a symbol of struggle in individual and social life. Here one need not worry about the actual historical happenings, what is important is the scripture’s philosophical underpinnings.

The Methodology of Self-correction

A striking feature of the Gita is its opening chapter portraying Arjuna’s state of despondence. Arjuna, the great hero, the great warrior, loses his strength of mind and stands dejected in the battlefield; he confesses: ‘*Vepathuscha sharire me romaharshascha jayate, gandivam sramsate hastat-tvak chaiva paridahyate*; and there is trembling in my body, and there is horripilation, the Gandiva (bow) slips from the hand and even the skin burns intensely.’¹ Arjuna is caught up with the disease of mental weakness, whereby his bow falls down and his body shivers. At this juncture Sri Krishna helps him regain mental strength,

self-confidence, and boldness to face life. The eighteen chapters of the Gita, expounded in seven hundred verses, make a treatise on psychology and philosophy that tackles the maladies caused by mental weakness.

As a psychologist and true philosopher Sri Krishna adopts a particular methodology to correct Arjuna’s mental state throughout the second and third chapters. He searches for the cause of Arjuna’s mental despondency, knowing that once this is removed, the effect goes along with it—this method can be compared with Buddha’s second and third Noble Truths, *dukkha samudaya* and *dukkha nirodha*. Sri Krishna does not ask Arjuna to immediately go and fight; on the contrary, he teaches him about the real nature of the human being, the immortal nature of the Atman, the will of God guiding people’s life and actions, the significance of undertaking one’s prescribed duties without expecting any results, and other teachings. The methodology adopted by Sri Krishna for the psychological cure of Arjuna is rooted in philosophy. But at the end of the whole discourse, in the last chapter, Sri Krishna gives Arjuna full freedom in following those teachings: ‘*Yathechhasi tatha kuru*; do as you like’ (18.63). This is a methodology for self-correction. When one is given freedom of action by not imposing a teaching, a sense of responsibility generally awakens in good people.

Though there seems to exist an outlook of liberalism in the Gita, at times Sri Krishna makes categorical pronouncements too. Arjuna’s state of mind, which can be called ‘Arjuna syndrome’ in modern times, is due to weakness. Therefore,

Sri Krishna categorically states: '*Klaibyam ma sma gamah partha naitat-tvayyupapadyate, kshudram hridaya-daurbalyam tyaktvottishtha parantapa*; O Partha, yield not to unmanliness. This does not befit you. O scorcher of foes, arise, giving up the petty weakness of the heart' (2.3).

In this oft-quoted verse of the Gita, which Swami Vivekananda says is the essence of this scripture, Sri Krishna asks Arjuna to assert his manliness. By yielding to unmanliness we forget the real purpose of life. Therefore, not yielding to unmanliness is what one should be aware of. This awareness brings the best out of a person.

By 'manliness' is meant both physical as well as mental strength, depth of thought, strength of conviction, faith in oneself, and practical efficiency. It is the type of character that enables us to develop faith in God and thereby overcome all difficulties. Manliness is required to call forth our hidden potentialities. There is immense potential and strength in each one of us. We are essentially strong. This is the positive attitude that Vedanta proclaims to all. In the Gita Sri Krishna tells Arjuna that unmanliness does not befit him. Any one of us can experience the despondency Arjuna passed through, so this is a message to humanity given by God. The weakness of mind is just a temporary aberration, a cloud produced by the very mind, which is bright by nature. Through this understanding we can deal with the state of our mental weakness. Swami Vivekananda says: 'The older I grow, the more everything seems to me to lie in manliness.'²

God's Help and Our Mental States

In the critical moments of our lives we need a helping hand by which we can regain strength and self-confidence. Sri Krishna asks the dejected Arjuna to stand up and face his problems. Weakness and virtue can never go together. Therefore, every page of the Upanishads exhorts

abhih, fearlessness, and shakti, strength. Strength is the cardinal message of the Upanishads. Swami Vivekananda says that strength is life and weakness is death. What we need for developing a good personality is a rare combination of strength and fearlessness coupled with compassion to all beings. It is said in the Gita: '*Yasman-nodvijate loko lokannodvijate cha yah*'; he, too, owing to whom the world is not disturbed, and who is not disturbed by the world.'³ The whole of the Upanishads and their quintessence, the Gita, teach the profound philosophy of human growth, development, and fulfilment. But this message would not reach out to a person who is mentally weak or lacks manliness.

A question naturally arises: what is the cause of Arjuna's state of despondency? It is nothing but the sense of 'I and mine'. Arjuna's mind was clouded with attachment and emotion for his own people, therefore he could not think clearly about the Truth. This overpowering of our emotions over our intellect always causes great troubles to us and others. Many of our irrational activities, and even heinous crimes, are the result of such overpowering negative emotions, which delude our minds and intellects. Hence, everyone should pay attention to improve his or her emotional quotient. Human beings, endowed with a large cerebral cortex, have the unique capacity of controlling their emotions. When the feelings are gradually calmed down, clear thinking begins.

That is why the Gita gives utmost importance to the ideal of *samatvam*, balance of the mind. *Samatvam* is identified as yoga: '*Yogasthah kuru karmani sangam tyaktva dhananjaya, siddhyasiddhyoh samo bhutva samatvam yoga uchyate*'; by being established in yoga, O Dhananjaya (Arjuna), undertake actions, casting off attachment and remaining equipoised in success and failure. Equanimity is called yoga'

(2.48). We should develop the capacity to keep the mind in balance under negative circumstances; this is the real test of human greatness, of human strength.

Modern neurology [is] telling us about the achievement of thermostatic equilibrium within the body, ... Everything is in balance. When it is upset by work, it automatically restores itself to balance. That is called the homeostatic condition of the human body. ... Claude Bernard, the famous French physiologist, had said ... 'a fixed interior milieu is the condition for the free life'. ... To expect high intellectual development in a mind which has not achieved a measure of inner stability is simply impossible. So, all intellectual growth, creative growth, and spiritual growth, need this prior stabilization of the human psychic system. ... *Śama* is the discipline of the mind. *Dama* is the discipline of the senses. When *Śama* and *dama* operate in me, then this *samatva* becomes well established. ... calmness, *samatvam*, becomes a natural state by constant practice of these two virtues.⁴

Yogasthah kuru karmani means doing actions from the yoga level of consciousness. It is a high mental level that keeps one in a balanced state. We should always try to live and work from a high level of consciousness. This the Gita identifies as *buddhi* yoga: '*Durena hya-varam karma buddhiyogad-dhananjaya, buddhau sharanam-anviccha kripana phalahetavah*; O Dhananjaya, indeed, action is quite inferior to the yoga of wisdom. Take resort to wisdom. Those who thirst for rewards are pitiable.'⁵ Here Sri Krishna asks Arjuna to take refuge in *buddhi* yoga. In the Upanishads and the Gita *buddhi* is given supreme importance, as it is the faculty of reasoning, logical analysis, discernment, and judgement. According to Gita, the *buddhi* should control the mind and the senses. When the *buddhi* is the master, the emotions and feelings are under its control. Hence, *buddhi* yoga means the integration of the intellect, the mind,

and the senses. Or it can be the integration of the faculties of reasoning, feeling, and willing. Plato also holds that one should never allow one's passions to ride over one's reason. While describing about the human personality Plato says that the rational part should guide the spirited and appetitive parts of the soul.

The above message of keeping the supremacy of the intellect over the mind and the senses is beautifully explained through the chariot allegory in the *Katha Upanishad*. Human life is a journey for which the body is the chariot, the sense organs are the horses, the mind is the reins, and the *buddhi* is the charioteer. The master of the chariot is the Atman, the Self. If the horses, along with the reins, run away from the hands of the charioteer, everything collapses and the traveller finds it difficult to reach the destiny. The *buddhi* is the only instrument for directing life and reaching the goal. For this reason it is said: 'take refuge in the *buddhi*'.

The Psychology of Human Actions

The natural tendency of the mind is to go downwards. It keeps company with the senses. Together they can make a person passionate and emotional. There is nothing wrong with the emotions, but they should be purified and properly directed by the intellect. In this context the Gita's account, in the fourteenth chapter, of the three *gunas*—*sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*—deserves attention. *Sattva* makes for the illumination of intelligence, *tatra sattvam nirmalatvat*; *rajas* leads to attachments and desires, *rajo ragatmakam viddhi*; *tamas* makes one deluded, *tamastv-ajnanajam viddhi*. A *sattvic* *buddhi* takes decisions after proper deliberation; a *rajasic* *buddhi* is influenced by prejudice and leads to actions without deliberation; a *tamasic* *buddhi* is confused and tends to avoid beneficial actions. That is why the Gita asks us


to raise our minds from *tamas* to *rajas*, and then from *rajas* to *sattva*. In fact, our desires, moods, and actions are to be traced to the influence of the three *gunas*. They have their own specific psycho-physical functions.

When one rises to the level of *buddhi* yoga, one tries to establish oneself in the Atman. When one rises above the level of the body and the mind, one's egoism reduces and work is performed with little selfish motives, generally for *lokasamgraha*, the welfare of humanity. At this level one works freely, because one is not tensed or worried about the results of the work; in other words, one becomes a karma yogi. *Buddhi* yoga directly amounts to karma yoga, the supreme teaching of the Gita. One must perform *svadharma*, one's duty, selflessly. Sri Krishna reminds Arjuna about his obligation in performing his *svadharma*.

Though stating that the Gita gives importance to karma yoga is a truism, it does not mean that the Gita undermines the importance of other yogas. In fact, the Gita stands for the integration of all the yogas—bhakti, karma, jnana, and raja. A true karma yogi is at once a jnani as well as a bhakta. It is interesting to note that the integration of the yogas is a call for the development of an integrated personality. A person in whom the head, the heart, and the hands work in perfect unison has an integrated personality. In such a person the reason, the emotion, and the will work in an integrated way, producing a balanced state of existence.

Therefore, it may be said that in the Gita 'yoga' is defined as *samatvam*. Sri Krishna encourages Arjuna to devote himself to yoga: '*Buddhiyukto jahatiha ubhe sukrita-dushkrite, tasmad-yogaya yujyasva yogah karmasu kaushalam*; possessed of wisdom, one rejects here both virtue and vice. Therefore devote yourself to (karma-) yoga. Yoga is skilfulness in action' (2.50). 'Śrī Kṛṣṇa defines the *yoga* taught in the *Gītā* as a double efficiency:

productive work efficiency, and inward personal or character efficiency.'⁶ By skilfulness here is meant external efficiency, productive work, as well as inward, personal efficiency. The Gita does not make a watertight division between sacred and secular life. Sri Krishna makes here an exhortation to humanity to achieve both outward and inward efficiency, the former through social welfare and development and the latter through spiritual growth and fulfilment. This verse of the Gita brings out the pragmatic significance of the scripture. Its message shapes the attitude with which we work and our work itself, bringing qualitative enrichment to human life.

Through its varied expressions, the Gita exhorts us to perform *svadharma* and utilize our situations for the good of the world. That the Gita is a philosophy of life is clear from the following words of Sri Aurobindo: 'Our object, then, in studying the Gita will not be mere scholastic or academic scrutiny of its thought; nor to place its philosophy in the history of metaphysical speculation, nor shall we deal with it in the manner of the analytical dialectic. We approach it for help and light and our aim must be to distinguish its essential and living message, that in it on which humanity has to seize for its perfection and its highest spiritual welfare.'⁷ 

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Advaita Vedanta's Method of Conquering Death

Dr P Radharani

IN SPITE OF DEVELOPMENTS in science and technology, death and the afterlife remain a mystery to humankind. What happens on death and after death is a question that arises in the minds of all people and has dogged humankind down its long history. Religion, mythology, philosophy, and folk wisdom all over the world have tried to answer this persistent and tricky question. Till now most of the answers presented are unsatisfactory, and science with its powerful methods and tools is trying to understand the mystery of life and death. But one thing is true: peoples' beliefs about life after death are always shaped by their faith in a particular religion, philosophy, culture, or education.

The *Katha Upanishad* takes up the question of the mystery of death in a unique way by bringing in the profound teachings of the Atman. Nachiketa, a bright boy, asks Yama, the god of death: 'This doubt that arises, consequent on the death of a person—some saying, "It exists", and others saying, "It does not exist"—I would know this, under your instruction.'¹ Yama, after trying to initially dissuade Nachiketa, who remained firm, taught him of the Reality that is beyond death: 'The intelligent Self is neither born nor does it die. It did not originate from anything, nor did anything originate from it. It is birthless, eternal, undecaying, and ancient. It is not injured even when the body is killed' (1.2.18). This is an astounding teaching, for it sees a reality that is much larger than death and life.

The concept of life and death, according to Advaita Vedanta, gives a clear view of the phenomenon of death and brings hope and courage to the human heart; its essential teachings help people face the problems arising from the fear of death, disease, afterlife, and the unknown. This article briefly looks at these salient features of Advaita Vedanta.

Brahman

The Reality, in the Advaita Vedanta philosophy, is called Atman or Brahman, which is by nature pure Consciousness devoid of all relative attributes. The Upanishads describe Brahman in different ways, but the principal definition is Satchidananda—Existence-Knowledge-Bliss, Absolute.

Brahman is beyond *desha-kala-nimitta*, space-time-causation, and hence one of the ways to explain it is in negative terms, such as '*neti, neti*; not this, not this.' One of the greatest teachings of the Upanishads is that individual consciousness, present in all beings, is relative; though in reality this consciousness is Brahman itself. Advaita Vedanta does not say that individual and universal consciousness are both real and different, as that would bring in duality and would not remove the prevailing confusion. This is one of the greatest difficulties for people to understand and accept Advaita, for it teaches that individual consciousness is illusory, and death is also a part of that illusion. What is real is universal consciousness.

Brahman is 'the supreme self and stands self revealed as the background of all affirmation and denials.'² When one tries to describe Brahman within the categories of understanding, or if one believes that it is an object of one's thought, then one is not able to understand the essential nature of Brahman. All that is really present in the world is Brahman itself; nothing exists outside of it. Everything comes out of Brahman, exists in Brahman, and finally returns to it. And creation, preservation, and destruction are mere appearances, like waves in the ocean.

The Atman, which is the same as Brahman, transcends the subject-object duality. The Atman, which is the unqualified absolute Reality, can never be denied, because its very denial presupposes it. 'All means of cognitions (pramanas) are found on it. To repudiate this self is impossible, for he who tries to refute it is the self' (283).

We try to know everything as an object. But the knowledge of any object has many dimensions and can never be perfectly known. In Advaita Vedanta the *jñata*, knower, can never be known as an object, because it is the subject. We can never truly describe the Self through our intellect, either as existent or as non-existent, because it is beyond all descriptions and categories we can think of or imagine. 'Brahman is devoid of homogenous, heterogeneous, and internal differences: *sajatiya vijatiya svagata-bheda sunyah*.'³ The Upanishadic statement '*neti neti*' points to the eradication of all gross, subtle, and causal characteristics superimposed on pure Consciousness, the absolute Reality. Pure subjectivity, taught by Advaita Vedanta, is Brahman—'one without a second'.

The world that we see is not one dimensional; it has multiple dimensions and levels of reality. Recognizing this fact Advaita Vedanta included the various dimensions into three broad levels of existence. The *vyavaharika-satta*,

relative or empirical reality, which includes all the known physical and mental dimensions. The next level of existence is *pratibhasika-satta*, illusory existence, like dream objects, mirage, pseudo-hallucinations, and so on, which exist only for a short period. The next level is *paramarthika-satta*, transcendental existence; at this level there is only one reality: Brahman. The *pratibhasika-satta* is contradicted or sublated by the *vyavaharika-satta*, and this in turn is sublated only by the *paramarthika-satta*. All relative and illusory existence is superimposed, *adhyasa*, upon the transcendental, and we take one for the other. The body and the world is taken for real, and the Reality is thought of as old, fat, thin, rich, learned, dying, and so on. The cause of *adhyasa* is due to the play of maya.

Maya

Nirguna Brahman appears as Ishvara, jiva, and *jagat*, phenomenal world. This aspect of Brahman is called Saguna Brahman. The appearance of that absolute Reality as the relative is due to the principle of maya. Thus maya is one of the central pillars on which the philosophy of Advaita Vedanta stands. For Acharya Shankara, *avidya*, nescience, is the answer to all questions regarding the world, birth, death, afterlife, and so on. One's true and sincere enquiry into this worldly existence leads to the concept of maya. In his commentaries on the Upanishads, Acharya Shankara makes the tremendous effort of systematically explaining maya so that we can understand it and let it go. But he was careful to base all his arguments according to the scriptures. Maya is 'the power of God, hidden by its own qualities.'⁴ 'One should know that nature is surely maya, and the supreme Lord is the Ruler of maya to be sure. This whole universe is verily pervaded by what are his limbs' (4.10). This maya is not a terrible phantom, destroying our lives

and peace, deluding us constantly by its various tricks and treats. Maya is divine. The Bhagavad-gita says: 'This divine maya of mine [God's], which is constituted by the *gunas* [*sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*], is surely difficult to cross over. Those who take refuge in me alone cross over this maya.'⁵ God shows us an easy way to transcend life and death and everything in between.

Acharya Shankara says that the universe has no existence apart from and independent of Brahman. A wrong perception about the Reality is responsible for the appearance of plurality. As a rope is wrongly seen as a snake, as silver is perceived as nacre, so is the world seen in place of Brahman. Therefore, maya projects this world of plurality and differentiation. It is described as *bhava-rupam*, something positive, and *yat-kinchit*, intangible. Maya is positive since it is experienced, and its effect works on the individuals who have not crossed its boundaries. It is also responsible for creating this world. It has two powers, one that conceals Brahman, *avarana*, and another that projects the world of plurality, *vikshepa*. Acharya Shankara, in his *Vivekachudamani*, beautifully describes it thus: 'She is neither existent nor non-existent nor partaking of both characters; neither same nor different not both; neither composed of parts nor an indivisible whole nor both. She is most wonderful and cannot be described in words.'⁶

Actually maya is what makes humans consider the 'sublatable' as the 'unsublatable'. Psychologically, maya is the tendency to regard appearances as reality and vice versa. The locus of maya is Brahman, but Brahman is really untouched by it, just like a magician who is untouched by his magic. Maya, by which the Absolute becomes manifested as this world, is only an illusion projected by the absolute itself. Dr S Radhakrishnan refers to maya as mystery and calls it 'the power of self-becoming.'⁷

Jiva

A human being is a combination of spirit and matter. The jiva, which is present inside, is in reality Brahman itself. Though the jiva is associated with the body, it does not really partake in any action; the sense organs function on their own accord. The state of being an agent and enjoyer of actions is really superimposed on the self through *avidya*. This self is the supreme Self, eternal, omnipresent, and pure. The apparent appearance of this supreme Self, as the self in the body, as bodies, and also as the world, is due to maya, *avidya*. The material body and the subtle mind are always in relation to some object or other. Maya produces the manifold jivas, when in fact there is only the non-dual Brahman, the Atman. The manifold is *mithya*, false, created by maya. Each jiva has its own karma, which limits and binds it.

Acharya Shankara believes in the plurality of empirical selves and the world we perceive, which lasts only till the knowledge of the Reality dawns. There is no conflict between the idea of the ultimate Reality as one and the idea of the plurality of jivas. Acharya Shankara beautifully describes it through an example of 'the sun appearing as many reflected images in different pools of water. As the water dries up the several images will get back to the original sun.'⁸

As long as the jiva does not wipe off *avidya*, it remains bound and subject to the modifications of birth, growth, disease, decay, and death. Because of *avidya*, the jiva has the false notion of 'I and mine', and this arises when the jiva's limiting adjuncts come into contact with the material world; the result is again more bondage. The false notions of 'I and mine' can be removed by right knowledge. Therefore, bondage can be destroyed by right knowledge, and the jiva can attain moksha, liberation. As the jiva is really non-different from Brahman, bondage

and liberation are in essence unreal. According to Advaita philosophy, the jiva never becomes Brahman, as it is always Brahman. 'Just as a pure transparent white crystal is wrongly imagined to be red on account of a red flower placed near it, similarly the non-dual Atman or Brahman is wrongly imagined to be the empirical self.'⁹

The birth of the present body was caused by the karma from previous lives. The destruction of karma can destroy the cycle of birth and death. And this is done by destroying *avidya*, which is the root of samsara, relative existence. *Avidya* can only be destroyed by the knowledge of Brahman. The means to attain this true knowledge is through *shravana*, hearing, *manana*, cogitating,

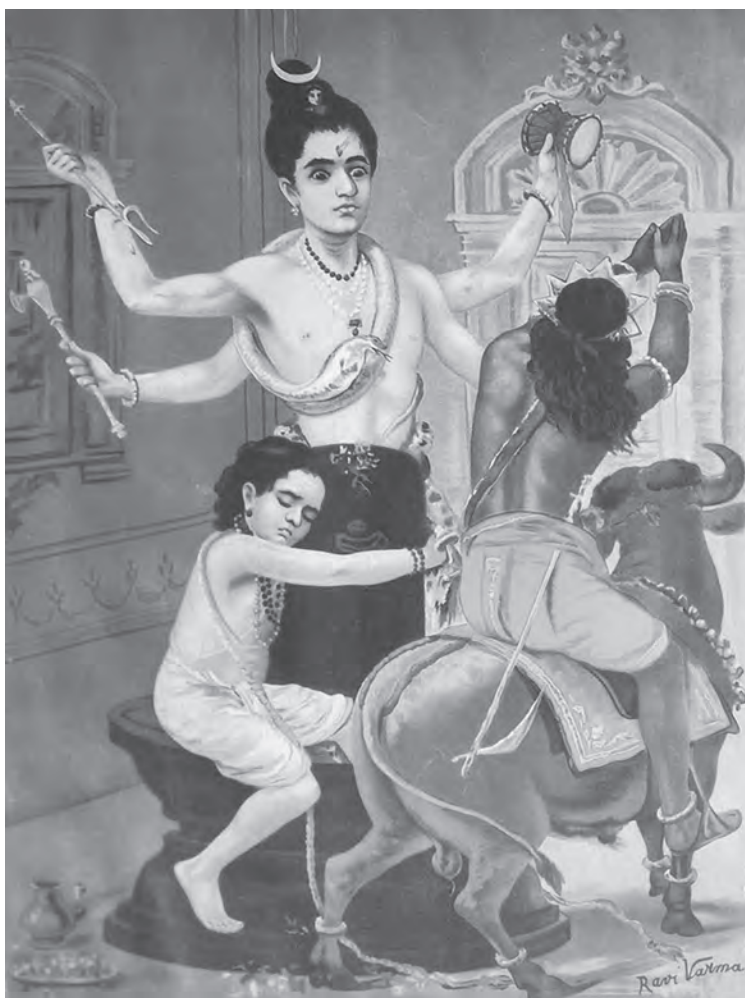
and *nidhidhyasana*, profound contemplation, of the non-dual Brahman.

A person ignorant of his or her essential unity with Brahman takes only diversity as true and wrongly regards oneself as an agent and the enjoyer. When a person realizes his or her essential unity with Brahman, then one is liberated and lives, as long as the *prarabdha* karma lasts, as a *jivanmukta*, free while still alive. *Videha mukti*, final release, is obtained after the death of the physical body.

The Goal of Human Life

Sri Ramakrishna says that the goal of human life is to realize God. The realization of God is the

Markandeya,
by Raja Ravi Varma,
1910



same as the realization of the Atman, because the Atman and Brahman are one. Acharya Shankara laid great emphasis on the *jnana-marga*, path of knowledge, but in this age Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda affirmed the combination of all the yogas—*jnana*, *bhakti*, *karma*, and *raja*. What is important is the eradication of *avidya* by any means whatsoever. ‘One’s finite being is rooted not only in the being of the Brahman, but also in ignorance, the latter has to be destroyed. Destruction of root ignorance is the destruction of finitude and the attainment of infinitude.’¹⁰ The attainment of infinitude is possible only by the removal of *maya*, which is the cause of cosmic illusion. And this can be attained only by controlling one’s sense organs and mind, by giving up all attachment to objects realizing their changing nature, and by having a wholehearted desire for liberation. Then one is fit to study Vedanta under a teacher and understand its truths by constant reasoning and meditation. To such a student the teacher would impart the secrets of Advaita Vedanta through the Upanishadic dictum ‘*Tat tvam asi*; thou art That’. The student should then meditate on this truth till he or she has direct realization of Brahman.

The fear of death, pain, misery, and so on arises because humans are subject to the laws of *maya*. The Atman that is present in the body has no death, pain, and suffering. It is one and not many. The highest ideal for a human being is also the highest possible human experience: to realize the Atman or Brahman.

Swamiji pointed out that fear is the greatest of all superstitions, and the root cause of all fear is the lack of clarity of thought, which comes from ignorance. A person who has attained Self-knowledge can overcome the fear of death. Acharya Shankara describes Brahman thus: ‘The wise man realizes in his heart, through *samadhi*, the infinite Brahman, which is something of the

nature of eternal knowledge and absolute bliss, which has no exemplar, which transcends all limitations, is ever free and without activity, and which is like the limitless sky, indivisible, and absolute.’¹¹ This knowledge of Advaita Vedanta was kept secret and was exclusive to a select class of people. In this age Swami Vivekananda broke the doors of exclusivity, preached the highest truths to all, and also declared that everyone is capable of attaining Self-knowledge.

Death is inescapable and inevitable, and life without death is impossible. Enlightened people may also experience disease, old age, and death, but they remain untouched by them because they know that those experiences are like dreams, never real. Such persons are free from desires because of non-identification with the body. They are in the world, but are not of the world. No attachment, no illusion can affect that luminous knowledge of the Reality. The liberated soul, being free from illusory ideas that separated it from Brahman, is free from the illusion of all misery and death and attains immortality.



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Eternal Words

Swami Adbhutananda

Compiled by Swami Siddhananda; translated by Swami Sarvadevananda

(Continued from the previous issue)

Holy Association, Devotion, Sadhana, and Steadfastness

DO YOU KNOW what happens to one who keeps holy company? If one actively pursues holy company, one develops right understanding, cultivates faith, and devotion to God. Jealousy and hatred go away. Bad feelings subside due to the exchange of spiritual ideas between the devotees. Also, a noble attitude prevails. An intense desire for japa and dhyana arises as well. Association with the holy is the means to become holy. There is a saying, 'Holy association is like living in Kashi'. Everyone wants to understand the result of holy company in just a day. Can that be understood in a day? Holiness accumulates little by little and becomes large; then only can people recognize and understand it.

Even if you are a great renunciate, you will become whatever you think of at the time of death. For that reason, as far as possible, one should think of holy thoughts; then at the time of death, thoughts of holiness will surely arise in the mind.

All the avatars have taught: 'Associate with the holy.' Genuine sadhus always keep themselves busy for God-realization.

It is very difficult to have devotion and faith to God. Without his grace it does not happen. For that reason alone one should understand how the sadhus have obtained his grace. Observe their lives and discuss the aspects of their holiness. For that very reason all the avatars have said: 'Associate with the holy.'

Reading holy scriptures, in which one finds conversations about God, has the same effect as associating with the holy. It is not possible to repeat the name of God at all times. It is for this very reason that one should study these kinds of scriptures. Such study is the same as recollecting and reflecting on God. For those who can repeat the name of God day and night, what is the difference between them and God?

As much as one can repeat the name of God, that much will one benefit. Even if one cannot do much, one should at least repeat any name of God one likes in the evening by clapping of hands.

God becomes pleased if one engages in holy conversations with honest persons. It brings right understanding. One should not even speak with a bad person, that is, persons with no faith in God. That generates wrong understanding and gradually causes one to forget God.

You should not give up japa and dhyana after practising for a few days because you have not attained God. As soon as you give it up, you will turn into a stern atheist. When your mental condition becomes like that, you should look at the practices of great spiritual personalities. You should teach your mind, 'As they have realized God in that manner, why shall I not attain the same?' Keeping their lives as an ideal, one should again engage in sadhana girding up one's loins. What is not possible to achieve by perseverance?

Many say that if they wish, they can destroy their samskaras, past latent impressions. But I do not see even one person who has destroyed his samskaras. Only one whose samskaras have been destroyed can destroy the samskaras of others. For this reason, holy company is essential. If one frequents holy people, by virtue of their holy qualities, one's bad samskaras will gradually diminish and one's good impressions will intensify. What good will come from merely visiting a doctor's office? One has to purchase and then swallow the medicine. Then only can one's disease get cured. What good is it only to loiter around a holy person? Receiving instructions from them, one should set to work accordingly. Then everything becomes right.

God's grace descends if, in every matter, one continues to practise restraint. Does anything happen if one does not practise restraint? Nothing happens.

One gets lost if one moves according to one's own whims. That person will be saved who lives following the instructions of God, sadhus, and holy persons.

Such is the glory of holy company that even an insect living inside an offered flower may get the chance to climb on top of Narayana's head. That is why the Lord told Uddhava: 'Keep holy company.' God's grace is attained by holy company.

Even if one receives the advice of renunciates, unless one is disciplined, one cannot comprehend or retain anything.

There are many mantras written in the scriptures. What will they do? If one can aptly receive instructions from great souls, one's life is instantly transformed.

It is very difficult to understand the *rasa*-lila [divine play of Sri Krishna with the gopis]. It cannot be comprehended unless one's senses are restrained and one's mind is pure.

Sri Krishna told Arjuna: 'If you properly accept my advice, you will be saved. If a doubt arises about this, associate with the holy. You will understand.'

Even if you earn thousands of rupees but your mind is unhappy and suffers, your earnings are in vain. If you are self-content, God becomes happy.

God loves a soul that is free and pure. He said: 'Oh man! Seek the company of that soul who knows the Self. Do not associate with one who is ignorant about me.'

You may call upon God by any name you wish, but follow the instructions of your guru.

Monks can eat a bellyful during the daytime. At night, they should eat lightly. Monks perform spiritual practices and devotions at night. Everything is tranquil then. That is why one should practise spiritual discipline and devotions at that time. Monks actually do that. The householders eat less during the daytime because that is when they have to work. They eat more after dark and snore away the night. Eating and sleeping are necessary for the sake of one's health. The Master used to say that peoples' minds rotate around food in this Kali Yuga. It is more than enough to sleep four to five hours at night. The Master would not allow us to eat more than four or five small offered *luchis* [deep-fried flatbreads] at night.

Chanting the *Chandi* is very good, but one should not be motivated by any desire at the time of reading. One should chant with the utmost devotion. Householders should chant the *Chandi* with great caution. If one cannot observe the rules in the right manner, the result is inauspicious. If one can chant with a pure mind, following the rules, surely it will bring one's welfare.

It is essential for a rich person to be honest so that many poor and destitute people can get food and sustenance. For this reason, one needs holy company. But wealthy people do not get holy company. Rather, all sorts of dishonest

people become their friends. They [dishonest people] enjoy the fun themselves by manipulating or twisting the minds of honest people. Because of this bad association, wealthy people generally do not achieve spiritual merit. Understanding this from one's youth, if one takes to the path of righteousness and holy association, it will bring one's welfare. They will have no dearth of money and thus, if they wish, they can surely bring welfare to many.

If one stays awake until late at night with mental tension, disease is inevitable. Can one eat when one is stressed? Tension in the mind is extremely harmful and surely causes one to suffer. There is a difference between good and bad thoughts. Noble thoughts lead one to spiritual development. Ignoble thoughts lead one along the path of degradation. A human being dies on account of ceaseless worry. Are the Master's words untrue? If one has a little means of obtaining one's daily food, it is wrong to become enslaved. Then there is no need to overly worry. Moreover, is there any joy even in earning? If the mind is not cheerful, the body does not stay well; what one eats remains undigested and gives rise to many diseases. If the mind is cheerful, the body remains happy; whatever one eats is digested and gives the body strength.

If you have the desire to do spiritual and devotional practices, go to a solitary place. Do not stay in the midst of unnecessary gossip and chit-chat. That will lead you nowhere. Will you eat free food and then go about gossiping? Fools do not understand how much harm this brings. You must not forget the purpose for which you have come.

As God has no caste, similarly, monks have none. God is manifested through the sadhus. One should not find fault with sadhus. One should only see their great love, respect, and devotion towards God. Giving up worldly

possessions and fear of public disgrace, the sadhu has become a beggar with the hope of attaining God. There is a great difference between worldly people and sadhus!

Such beings as Sri Ramachandra and Mahavira are all under *sat* maya [maya that liberates from bondage]. Does this kind of maya bring harm? No. People get liberated. Of course, you should contemplate on them! What good will come of thinking about the useless things of this world?

If one wants to remove the obstacles to dhyana—the sleep and distracting modes of the mind-stuff—one must sit in a proper posture with a determined mind. In this way, even if the mind is not controlled, one must sprinkle water on the eyes or go for a short walk and return to his seat again to overcome lethargy. It is good to remove the obstacles of sleep and the like sitting on one's asana; there is less fear of disturbing the flow of one's spiritual current. At the end of japa people feel drowsy; the spinal column becomes strained. Get up and walk around a little, then return to your seat. This is a rule for sadhana. Otherwise the mind does not become absorbed. If the body becomes overheated, some feel a loss of physical strength at the time of sleep.

Inner renunciation is very good. One will not be able to discover that one is a person of renunciation. As a result, obstacles such as pride and the like cannot enter the mind. But this is very difficult. When the external desires silently enter into the heart, they become extremely hard to detect. That is why one should stay highly alert in this matter. It is not easy to practise internal and external renunciation at first. In the end, nothing can resist a genuine renunciate—a supremely competent person. Renunciation and enjoyment are performed by him like an innocent child. He is not at all attached to anything.

The Lord said that fools regard faulty things as praiseworthy and worthy things as flawed. This is the play of the world. For this reason, one needs holy company. After discrimination one should accept this. When the right understanding arises, then only will a person obey God and be respectful and devoted to his elders. Wrong understanding causes one's comprehension to diminish, and one suffers.

One cannot understand the pain of a sadhu unless one is a sadhu. How much suffering the sadhus undergo; only then they receive God's grace.

This cat will become wild when it goes to the forest. A person verily becomes divine by continually associating with the holy. You have come to the holy land of Kashi. There is no need for philosophical arguments; do dhyana and japa. One should perform dhyana and japa in such a secretive manner that even his wife will not know he is doing dhyana and japa. From three until six in the morning is the most auspicious time. Also do sadhana in the evening.

At first, holy company acts in a subtle way.

Gradually, towards the end, the fruit of holy company can be realized. The Master used to say, whether you advance or not on this side [the worldly side], try for greater achievement on that side [the spiritual side]. In life, many waves will come. Sometimes a mood of faithlessness, sometimes disbelief, and sometimes frustration will come. Be very careful. Don't give up the mantra given by your guru. By continuous sadhana the breath becomes steady; this leads to *kumbhaka* [stilling of the breath], and the mind becomes extremely calm. Even that state is not the end of sadhana. Try to move farther ahead.

All of the sadhus have come here giving up everything for the sake of eternal joy. Why do you trouble a sadhu? Due to the fact that they have undergone much austerity, they are now getting a little joy! Receiving their advice, you should also do sadhana. What will you understand if you do not do sadhana or gain self-control?

What will you achieve by pressing your nostrils? Do dhyana and japa and you will spontaneously achieve *kumbhaka*. On the one hand, one is pressing his nostril; on the other, one



Sadhus at The Chowk,
Faizabad, c.1880

has an extreme lack of self-control! This is why nothing happens.

If one does not accept a little austerity and pain, nothing at all will happen. For that reason, people visit the four holy places. One can attain love and devotion for the guru and understand his glory after going around the four holy places. If the guru showers his grace, what was not supposed to happen in this world will surely happen. As a boy of five, with the grace of his mother and his guru, Dhruva realized God. Thus a spiritual plane called *dhruva-loka* came into being.

It is very good if you can undergo spiritual disciplines and have devotion. If you cannot, eat and be merry, but don't harm anyone, don't be jealous. Jealousy is truly a sin. Be it in regard to worldly or spiritual matters try to help each other. Give up jealousy.

You cannot even cultivate love for your own father and brother; is it an ordinary thing to develop love for the divine ones, for God and for the guru? How fortunate is the one who has this! It requires single-minded devotion. One has to persevere—that is the goal of life. Then, surely, spiritual progress will come.

People survive on hope. There is great burning in this world, great pain. If one honest person lives among ten dishonest persons, that one will die. If there is one dishonest person among ten honest persons, that one becomes honest. Such is the effect of association. People say nothing if one is good; the trouble starts when one is not.

How will the samskaras be wiped out? Take the name of the Lord, sing his glories, keep holy company, meditate and do japa and such practices.

He indeed is already formless, but also with form. I believe in God with form. Some Christian devotees asked: 'You say he is with form; can he be seen?' I replied: 'I am definitively saying "yes". He can be seen. I speak with him as I am speaking with you. At times your mind becomes

confused about the question of whom to meditate on and whom to believe. Do you have faith in Jesus the Christ and the Master? All of these days, in whom did you maintain your faith? As you are Christians, obey Christ. Well, meditate on him alone. Through that you will attain everything. If you hold on to one, you obtain everything.'

What will you do other than intense spiritual practice and devotion? Amongst us, Kali [Abhedananda], Sharat [Saradananda], Rakhal [Brahmananda], Shivananda Maharaj, and others, used to practise severe austerities. They continue to do so even now. There is no comparison with Swami Vivekananda. One can understand the goal of life when one contemplates on the lives of such great souls. As soon as one understands this, all confusion ends. Jealousy and hatred move far off and the heart expands.

What more austerity will you do? Don't even utter the word austerity. The constitution of the body and mind is different for people who undertake austerities. But as much as you can take the name of the Lord, that much is beneficial. Beyond that, there is no other option.

Is it a matter of ordinary fortune to obtain shelter at the feet of a great soul? It is the special grace of God. As you have obtained that, don't while away your time in useless folly. You know how to sing; why not try to unite oneself with God through music? Is music a lesser means? See how Mira Bai realized God by singing his praise! There are many such great souls.

During japa and dhyana, lethargy, dullness, and drowsiness come. That is the very nature of the body. One must forcefully brush off and throw these away; otherwise, go for a little stroll, and when laziness goes away, then come back and sit. Thus, by gradual practice, all those types of obstacles depart.

God has given strength to all. He who directs that power towards Truth becomes Truth

himself; and he who directs that power towards untruth becomes deluded.

Practise dhyana and devotion morning and evening. At such times nature is favourable and the mind quickly becomes steady in the thought of one's chosen ideal. There are no other times more conducive than these to perform spiritual and devotional practices. At other times of the day, the mind does not become as steady.

One should perform spiritual and devotional practices alone in a solitary place. Spiritual and devotional practices are not possible in the midst of a crowd. Instead of making progress, it surely brings one's demise. It is very congenial to build up one's life at the Math. For building up one's spiritual life, there is no such place like the Math. You can do spiritual and devotional practices in solitude once you attain steadiness of mind. The Math is not a place for a sadhu to live his entire life. The spiritual attitude of a monk does not rightly blossom unless one stays for some time without possessions or company.

What good will it do to talk big after only reading books and say 'so and so has said this and another has said that'? Tell me, what is your experience? To learn about spiritual knowledge is good. But that same knowledge turns to ignorance if one performs no spiritual and devotional practices. Leaving behind all of this madness—memorizing books, thinking of giving lectures, and writing in newspapers—be engaged in spiritual and devotional practices. Spend hours and hours in meditation. The Master used to love Swamiji so dearly. But have you heard how much severe austerity Swamiji had to undergo? And you people, who do no spiritual practices and devotion and only read a few books, want to be like Swamiji! You are asking for my grace. Who am I to shower grace on you? If you don't like me, from tomorrow, don't come. Have you heard the name of Swamiji whom the whole

world respects? Even he became that Swamiji by the grace of the Master. The Master has the authority to shower grace. Pray to him for his grace. He will shower it.

The Master used to say that too much dancing and crying is not good. It ruins the spiritual mood. My dear, can one force a spiritual mood to develop? That is a matter of spiritual practice. It is to be attained after performing great austerities.

Surely everyone loves an honest man. Holy association is beneficial. Stay in holy company day after day. Holy association alone will carry a person beyond the joys and sorrows of this world. A sadhu, a devotee, a rich man, and a business man—all these keep photos of gods and goddesses. Sadhus and devotees worship those same photos. That means, absorbing in their hearts the spiritual moods of those pictures, they attain knowledge and devotion and gain fulfilment by reaching God, which is the only goal of human life, while others keep them for room decorations. They attain neither knowledge nor devotion. Look, the very same object, due to the difference in the manner of its use, will bring different results. The Lord says: 'Oh man! You must associate with sadhus if you want to learn how to use things properly.' I am saying emphatically: holy company is required!

Holy thoughts engender holiness itself. For this reason, one should keep holy thoughts at all times. Don't nurture evil thoughts at all. For that reason, you should associate with holy company, practise dhyana and japa, and study holy books. If the mind settles down in such thoughts, there will be a great relief from all the rest [impure thoughts]. A person surely must do some work or other. One cannot exist without it. On account of this, it is best for one to do good work rather than bad. The result of doing bad work is the same as entertaining evil thoughts.

(To be continued)

Svarajya Siddhih: Attaining Self-dominion

Gangadharendra Saraswati

Translated from Sanskrit and annotated by Swami Narasimhananda

(Continued from the April 2013 issue)

BRAHMAN CONDITIONED by maya and having the qualities of omnipresence and omniscience is the cause of the universe. However, in reality it is Satchidananda, non-dual, and self-luminous. Brahman alone is the meaning of all the scriptures, and it alone is called *pratyagatman*, inmost Self, by the Shaivites and realized by the *jivanmuktas*. This Brahman has been expounded and now, in the next twenty-five verses, the views stating entities other than Brahman as the cause of the universe are quashed, and the stance of Advaita is being gloriously established. In the next eight verses all the opponents are summarily set aside.

सांख्यैः प्रख्यापितं न क्षममिह जगतां निर्मितौतत्प्रधानं
हेतुर्नैतादृशेऽर्थे प्रभवति गदितस्तार्किकैरीश्वरोऽपि ।
नाणुः काणादबौद्धक्षपणकभणितो नापि निस्साक्षिशून्यं
तस्मादास्माकमेव श्रुतिगदितपरब्रह्मसिद्धं निदानम् ॥ १६ ॥

The Pradhana spoken of by Sankhya and Yoga (philosophies) is not capable of creating this universe. The Ishvara posited as the efficient cause of the universe by Yoga, Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Tantra, and Pashupatas is also incapable of creating this universe. The atom propounded by the Buddhists, Arhats, and Vaisheshikas is also not capable of creating the universe. The Shunya propounded by Shunyavadins is also not capable of creation. Therefore, the Parabrahman spoken of in our scriptures is alone the primal cause of the universe.

The creation of the universe is an act that cannot be conceived by our minds because the universe itself is beyond our comprehension. By seeing a pot we can infer that it is made up of clay. Similarly seeing the external world and our inner selves, we conclude that the world is made up of differences, happiness, misery, and delusion and, accordingly, infer that this world should be made up of something having the same qualities. That is why Sankhya holds that the universe is created by Pradhana, Prakriti. However, to posit that Pradhana, which is not conscious, can create a universe for the purpose of exhausting the karmas and for the liberation of the conscious soul, by modifying principles like *mahat*, cosmic mind, is nothing but a imagination of one's brain. When the universe involves upon dissolution, *pralaya*, the modifications of *mahat* and the other principles also go away. Pradhana, which has the three *gunas* of *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas* in equilibrium, is incapable of creating the universe. It is seen in practice that even small constructions like a portico of a house are efficiently done by persons with deliberate and conscious efforts and not by non-conscious things. Therefore, Pradhana, being non-conscious, does not have the capability to create the universe.

Now we see another school of thought. Indeed, each one of the objects in the universe has the same changeful nature. Let it be so. Then,

the special Purusha—Ishvara, untouched by afflictions or the results of actions, independent, conscious, and beyond grasp—creates the universe consisting of earth and other elements, just like the creation of objects like a pot. The Yoga, Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Tantra, and Pashupata philosophies consider Ishvara to be the efficient cause of the universe, but Ishvara is also incapable of creating the universe. There is a possibility of one argument leading to another and various contradictory inferences being drawn. So, following the statements of the scriptures, we can hold that Ishvara cannot be the efficient cause of the universe. The arguments of Ishvara being the efficient cause of the universe have been quashed. Now arguments of other things being the material cause of the universe are being set aside.

The Vaisheshikas, Buddhists—Sautrantrika and Vaibhasika—and the Arhats hold that the *anu*, atom, is the material cause of the universe. Their line of argument runs thus: A cloth is made of threads, threads are made up of fibres, and fibres are in turn made from cotton. If one traces the source of each of these objects in this series, one ends up with the most basic unit, the atoms. Two atoms join together to form dyads, which in turn create different kinds of matter, like the four basic elements—earth, water, fire, and air. This is the opinion of the Vaisheshikas. The Buddhists believe that the atoms are the basic units, which are ephemeral and take the form of different objects, both inside and outside of us. Both these schools of thought essentially hold the same view in this respect. However, this is not how the universe is created. Curd is formed from the transformation of milk, just as a sprout is formed from the transformation of a seed. In both the cases the cause does not remain in its original form. This kind of transformation of the cause into the effect creates a difference

called *parināma-bheda*, difference arising out of the transformation of one thing to another. Here we do not see such transformation either in the case of the *mahat* or of the atom, and so neither of them can be held to be the material cause of the universe. In this case, even if we were to accept them to be the material cause of the universe, the cause and the effect do not come together. A tree and its branches are different only in form, but in essence they are the same tree. Similarly, in the present context, even if we were to accept that there is transformation, we do not see any new substance being created, and so we cannot accept the position of the presence of a cause and an effect here.

It is established that neither the *mahat* nor the atom are the material cause of the universe. The Shunyavadins hold that Shunya is the cause of the universe. Shunyavadins believe that since in this kind of creation of the effect upon the transformation of the cause, the cause is non-existent, existence comes out of non-existence. That cannot be, because we see that when a pot is made out of clay or a sprout comes out a seed, the previous forms of the causes are destroyed and a new form is created, due to the transformation of the cause that existed then. Nothing can come out of nothing. In his commentary on the *Brahma Sutra*, Acharya Shankara says:

The nihilists do not admit any lasting and persisting cause (inhering in the effect), so that their view amounts to saying that something comes out of nothing. And they show that existence comes out of non-existence when they assert, 'The effect cannot arise without destroying the cause; for the sprout comes out of a seed when the latter is destroyed and a pot out of a lump of clay when the latter is destroyed. Were a product to come out of an unchanging cause, anything could come out of anything and anywhere; for the cause is common to all.' Thus since (according to them) the sprout and the

rest emerge from the seed and the rest when these latter get swallowed up in non-existence, they conclude that existence comes out of non-existence.

With regard to this we say: Existence does not come out of non-existence. If something can come out of nothing, then it becomes useless to refer to special kinds of causes, since non-existence as such is indistinguishable everywhere. There is no distinction, as regards the nature of non-existence, between the non-existence arising from the destruction of the seed and the rest and the horn of a hare, both being equally unsubstantial (false). Had there been any distinction, then only would the assertion of such separate causality be meaningful as, 'The sprout comes out of the seed alone, and the curd out of the milk alone'. But when an indistinguishable non-existence is posited as the cause, the sprout and the rest may as well spring out of a hare's horn and the like. This is, however, contradicted by experience. If, again, distinctive attributes be ascribed to non-existence on the analogy of the lotus etc. having (features) like blueness etc., then on that very analogy of objects like lotus etc., non-existence will turn into existence by the very fact of possessing distinctive qualities. Moreover, non-existence can never be the source of anything, precisely because it is non-existent like the hare's horn etc. Were existence to arise out of non-existence, all the effects would be imbued with non-existence. But that goes against experience, for all things are perceived to exist as positive entities with their respective distinguishing features.⁹⁰

Acharya Shankara quashes Shunyavada again in his commentary on the *Bṛihadaranyaka Upanishad* and considers it even unworthy of refutation: 'As for the view of the nihilist, since it is contradicted by all the evidences of knowledge, no attempt is being made to refute it.'⁹¹ However, some modern scholars opine that Acharya Shankara was too harsh with Buddhism and

did not take the concept of Shunyavada in the proper sense:

Shaṅkara takes the word 'Shūnya' in the sense of mere negation and says that Shūnyavāda which is pure nihilism is contradicted by all valid means of cognition. It stands self-condemned. The Shūnyavādin, says Shaṅkara, cannot legitimately negate all phenomenal practices unless he finds higher truth (anyattattva). Shaṅkara therefore summarily dismisses Shūnyavāda taking it to be below criticism. But really Shūnyavāda does admit such higher truth (Tattva) and is absolutism.⁹²

However, we stick to the stance of Acharya Shankara as, by far, his philosophy is most rational, as Swami Vivekananda says: 'Shankaracharya arose and once more revived the Vedanta philosophy. He made it a rationalistic philosophy. In the Upanishads the arguments are often very obscure. By Buddha the moral side of the philosophy was laid stress upon, and by Shankaracharya, the intellectual side. He worked out, rationalised, and placed before men the wonderful coherent system of Advaita.'⁹³

Who witnesses Shunya? For every phenomenon there should be a witness. If Shunya is to be accepted, then some entity should witness it. If no one witnesses Shunya, then it cannot exist. In creation and dissolution, does Shunya have a witness or not, or is it the cause? If we were to hold that Shunya does have a witness, then it cannot be held any further that Shunya is the cause of the universe, because the witness will precede Shunya. If we were to hold that there is no witness of Shunya, then its very entity cannot be established, forget about holding it as the cause of the universe. When a sprout comes out of a seed, the seed-form is destroyed. When a pot is made from clay, the clay-form is destroyed. However, the effects, the sprout and the pot, do have the characteristics of the seed and the clay and so,

the seed and the clay are the material causes of the sprout and the pot respectively. This illustration does not have any contradiction. Even the cause here, which is the seed or the clay, cannot be said to have come from Shunya. Every transformation takes place in a positive entity. There cannot be a transformation from non-existence. Therefore, there is no valid proof for holding that Shunya is the cause of the universe. And so, based on the teachings of the Upanishads, we, the Advaitins, hold that Brahman alone is the efficient and material cause of the universe.

The viewpoint of Sankhya has been summarily set aside in the last verse. However, an allegation could be raised: how can one hold that some persons desirous of seeking liberation have lesser intellect as they too have their faculties of understanding and reasoning. Even the scriptures extol sage Kapila, the propounder of Sankhya philosophy: 'The sage Kapila, when he was born in the beginning, and whom he (God) saw as he was being born.'⁹⁴ He had many disciples who have created a tradition, have proclaimed his omniscience, and have put forth varied arguments in support of his philosophy. They have reaffirmed the means of liberation mentioned in his books. However, they have got into a path of delusion.

It is a case of *andha-go-laṅgūla-nyāya*, the maxim of the blind man and the bull's tail. This maxim is based on a story. There was a son who had wealthy parents and was brought up in luxury. He always indulged in sense pleasures and extravaganza. He had friends who used his wealth for their enjoyment. Once he invited his friends for hunting in the forest. When the excitement of hunting was at its peak, his friends took him to a lonely spot in the forest, drugged him, robbed him of all his money and valuables, blinded him, and fled. Deserted, he tried going home, but could not. A rogue saw his

condition and decided to make fun of him. The rogue guided the blind man's hand to the tail of a wild bull and said, 'Hold on to this. It will lead you home.' The rogue then hit the bull hard and made it run. The blind man listened to the advice and held on to the tail even after getting knocked around by the bull, which was running amok. He did not leave the tail because he believed in the words of the rogue whom he considered his saviour. Such is the predicament of people who blindly believe in dualistic philosophies in utter discard to the noble path shown by the Vedas. Such people lose their resolve. Therefore, in the next verse the path shown by the tradition of teachers, including Badarayana and Acharya Shankara, is being reaffirmed and the view of Sankhya is being completely, and specially, countered following *pradhāna-mallānyāya* or the maxim of defeating the leader of the wrestlers. The maxim is that if one has to defeat many opponents, it is enough if the chief opponent is completely defeated, and then the other opponents automatically lose ground. It is in this spirit that the next verse quashes the Sankhya view.

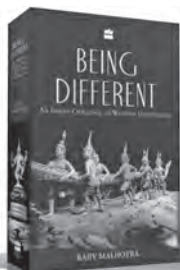
(To be continued)

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REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,
publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications



Being Different: An Indian Challenge to Western Universalism

Rajiv Malhotra

HarperCollins, A-53, Sector 57, Noida
201 301. Website: www.harpercollins.co.in. 2011. viii + 474 pp. ₹ 599.

It is now clichéd that Western metaphysics and epistemic discourses agree that their continuous endeavour is to ‘search for an elusive stability’ (52); therefore, this search is doomed to failure, since such a Logos cannot be in truth found anywhere in the world, leave alone the very societies that produced such Logocentric philosophies. Rajiv Malhotra, in this magisterial work, deconstructs with extreme care the nuanced structures of Western philosophy and successfully shows how they are incapable of managing the economies of ‘more fluid categories of social and political identity’ (ibid.) encountered within the ideological space created by Indian philosophers. For example, Malhotra looks at Kant’s ‘categorical imperative’ through the *Manu Smṛiti*. This is perfectly justified: it is now time to interrogate the whole of Western ethics through the lens of Indian Shastras, since the West has time and again seen India through its own religious and philosophical corpus—Edward Said’s seminal *Orientalism* exposed the West’s malicious project to dominate Indians in the guise of an ideology-free scholarship of Oriental theologies and philosophies.

The need to resist Western undermining of Indian culture is still relevant. Historians like Niall Ferguson keep reiterating about the good that imperialism supposedly did Indians. Malhotra’s book is an effort at subverting this hegemonic narrative of epistemic superiority. He speaks of the need for the ‘Indian gaze upon the West itself’ (53). This reviewer finds the phrase ‘Indian gaze’ felicitous and much needed for future scholarship within

Indology as well as such diverse fields as European and American Studies. Malhotra’s book problematizes the very act of reading and *doing* area studies, since reading, as we know it, is now a Western praxis that prioritizes the individual over the communal substituting once for all the value of *shruti*, listening, and *manana*, cogitation, both of which are integral to Hinduism, with a misplaced solipsism. This point needs to be kept in mind since orality and the effect or aural religion are important to any worshipping community—Walter Ong had written eloquently about the power of the spoken word, and Jacques Derrida built his reputation by writing about Western Logocentricity or the lack thereof. Can Western metaphysics be practised without recourse to Eastern hermeneutics? This is the main challenge posed by *Being Different*.

Though South American theologians like Fr Gustavo Gutierrez OP and Fr Jon Sobrino SJ have tried to contextualize Western metaphysics and Catholic theology, yet their very efforts have been circumscribed by the Vatican, often enough to force Western metaphysics into an epistemic retreat. Susan Neiman, a Shoah scholar, who extensively talks about the problem of evil in Western theology and philosophy, points out this exact failing of Western philosophy in tackling the lived experiences of cosmopolitanism, which is more evident in multilingual India than in nations like Canada and the US, which are at most bilingual. Thus Malhotra’s intellectual context and equivalence are Kwame Appiah and Martha Nussbaum. Whereas they plead for the embracing of cosmopolitanism, tracing this concept’s roots to the rise of the Greek *polis*, Malhotra, without mentioning the term ‘cosmopolitanism’, shows how it is *already* intrinsic to Indian society and what he calls the dharmic religions. His justification for writing the book is to use the ‘dharmic tradition’ to mimetically show the errors of Western historiography and history of ideas, thereby to clean it of

years of misrepresentation and distortion.

The Judaeo-Christian tradition finds a personal God acting within the here and the now of history, a meta-narrative oriented teleologically. Malhotra instead, in the second chapter of his book, speaks of this very problem of history and puts forth the canon of yoga as a valid register for comprehending the world. Instead of relying on limiting enlightenment ideas about history, Malhotra urges us to use the term *itihasa*, which is more ontologically sound and inclusive of subjective states—like the mythopoetic urges, which are common to all of us, much in the manner of Carl Jung's 'collective unconscious'.

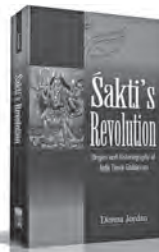
Malhotra also makes a very important point in this book: he distinguishes between history and *itihasa*; the latter is 'fundamentally pluralistic' (66), proving Western historiography as implicitly ossified and inflexible in its insistence on fixating on one particular version of the past. This leads us to rethink historiography and how contemporary empirical drives within the specialized field of historical scholarship the world over are tainted with the errors that motivate fundamentalism. Once again, by referring to the ancient Indian corpus, Malhotra not only comes out as a cosmopolitan himself but also locates the source of cosmopolitanism in our own past. What Emmanuel Lévinas calls 'hospitality', Malhotra shows already being present within the Indian traditions, since in India 'there are no infidels' (135). Everyone is welcome within the dharmic religions.

It is important to repeatedly contextualize Indologists within the matrix of scholarship of other religions, especially with those termed as 'the people of the book'. Malhotra's only shortcoming is that he fails to synoptically read Indian theologies with those constructed by the likes of the Rahner Brothers, both Jesuits, Fathers Lonergan SJ, and the Cistercian Thomas Merton—maybe Malhotra will contemplate these authors and Hinduism in the future. Within the Indian context he could have compared the works of Father Amaladoss SJ with contemporary Hindu thinkers; but then these are wishes of the reviewer since the need of the hour is syncretism, which requires interdisciplinarity rather than earlier methods of focussing on only one area of study.

Books of this sort tend to be visually unappealing, with scant notes, innumerable typos, and shoddy cobbling indexes generally done at the last moment. Rajiv Malhotra's book thankfully has none of these faults; it is a pleasure to see and hold this book, which has a crisp printing on environment friendly paper. The appendices are inclusive; for example, they reproduce Jain sources. The notes are detailed and the index extremely well done. It is recommended that this book not only be made compulsorily available to South East Asian Studies' departments but also in humanities departments where Indian literature in English is taught. It provides a corrective to the reductionist works of such scholars as Wendy Doniger and exposes literature students to the reality and scope of Indian metaphysics—a student will hardly know how to tackle the issue of Advaita and 'time' in the novels of Raja Rao unless he or she reads this sort of text. Avowedly, this is a philosophical and historical treatise, but it is also invaluable to other fields of social sciences trying to remap the ideological terrain of India. We have already had too much of materialist subaltern studies. This book is a new alternative to spiritless history books that rob India of established truths.

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Śakti's Revolution

Donna Jordan

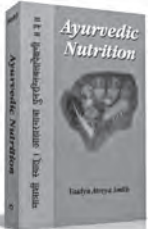
Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers,
PO Box 5715, 54 Rani Jhansi Road,
New Delhi 110 055. Website: www.mrmlbooks.com. 2012. xxxiv + 481 pp.
₹ 1595.

Religious beliefs have always been integral to human culture. These beliefs, like culture, have been dynamic, changing according to the development of the human mind. From religious beliefs have sprung art, myth, folklore, and of course the scriptures, which have constantly enriched the cultural milieu. Today, in the academic world, studies on the subject of Shakti or goddesses do not always take a comprehensive view and carry unfortunate overtones on fertility and sex. No doubt the studies ought to see how the ideas of

relationship, sacrifice, marriage, birth, and death grew and influenced the worship of the various goddesses, but then they should transcend to the higher level in order to see what has given consistency and continuity to Shakti worship.

From time to time, however, one finds authors like Donna Jordan who, having an incredible range of academic accomplishments, produce a painstaking, sensitive, and insightful work on Shakti worship. Donna Jordan moves deep into the field of India's fierce goddesses, which are found in many cultures, and tries to integrate her numerous findings. The book takes one from the primitive beliefs in the goddesses, through centuries of evolution and proliferation, to the present and varied forms of Mother worship. The author encapsulates numerous disciplines like history, philosophy, religion, sociology, anthropology, and other related fields to depict the source and influence of Indic goddesses. She closes her work by pointing to the necessity and role of Shakti in modern times.

PB



Ayurvedic Nutrition

Vaidya Atreya Smith

Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 41 U A Bungalow Road, Jawahar Nagar, Delhi 110 007. Website: www.mlbdc.com. 2011. XXV + 338 pp. ₹ 395.

There has been a great interest in Ayurveda all over the world, which in turn has attracted many researchers and experimenters to discover more subtle aspects of this science. Written in a lucid and humorous style, this book gives individualistic nutrition plans for the three Ayurvedic personality types—*vata*, *pitta*, and *kapha*. All aspects of these types are analysed and linked to various categories of food. Explaining the proper way of eating, trends of dieting and food consumerism are denounced and vegetarianism is advocated. Proper tending of the stomach fire, *jataragni*, and avoiding of poisoned food are taught. Various fruits, vegetables, beverages, and other items have been listed for all constitution types. Containing plans to improve lifestyle and metabolism, this volume would be palatable to anyone who cares about nutrition and health.

PB

BOOKS RECEIVED



Sanskrit is Fun

Ed. Warwick Jessup and Elena Jessup

Motilal Banarsidass. 2012. Part I, x + 74 pp.; Part II, x + 76 pp.; Part III, x + 58 pp. ₹ 95 each.

The three parts in these series introduce the learner to the Devanagari alphabet. Each lesson takes a vowel or a family of consonants, inviting to draw them through simple and funny games and drawings. The books make easy the first steps into Sanskrit.



The Stories of Krishna

Ed. Warwick Jessup and Elena Jessup

Motilal Banarsidass. 2012. Part I, xiv + 162 pp.; Part II, xv + 189 pp. ₹ 175 each.

These two parts, comprising the second group of books to study Sanskrit, cover most common types of nouns and the conjugation of basic verbs. The lessons are taught through stories based on Sri Krishna's childhood, making the learning process very appealing.



The Story of Rāma

Ed. Warwick Jessup and Elena Jessup

Motilal Banarsidass. 2012. Part I, xviii + 125 pp.; Part II, xiv + 137 pp. ₹ 175 each.

Comprising the third group of Sanskrit learning books, these two parts teach the standard method of transliteration, the gerunds, and a few declensions. The important prefixes and participles, along with the conjunctions, are also taught. And all through the retelling of sixteen episodes of Sri Rama's life, which helps one connect emotionally to the lessons.

REPORTS



*Vivekananda Ratha Yatra
at Ranchi Morabadi*

Commemoration of the 150th Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda

A Vivekananda Ratha Yatra (procession with Vivekananda carriage) was launched on 13 April 2013 from **Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya, Coimbatore**. Many dignitaries and more than 3,000 devotees and students attended the function. The Ratha will pass through Puducherry and all the 32 districts of Tamil Nadu, to be finally received at **Vivekanandar Illam (Vivekananda House), Chennai**, on 8 January 2014. Details about the Ratha Yatra are available at <www.srkv.org/ratham>.

Another Vivekananda Ratha Yatra (2013–14) was launched on 25 April from **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Ranchi Morabadi**. It will cover six states in North India, namely Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and Uttarakhand.

The following centres organized various programmes to commemorate the 150th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda. **Asansol**: A youth convention on 24 March, in which 70 students of 18 schools participated. **Chandigarh**: 24 value education programmes for 4,715 students and 3 value education workshops for 400 teachers from January to March. **Chennai Students' Home**: Seminars and various cultural competitions from August to November 2012, in which 2,763 students from 321 schools of Chennai participated.

Cherrapunji: The concluding event of the tribal and folk cultural programmes of the northeast region was held at Cherrapunji centre on 30 March 2013; in it 30 troupes representing different tribal groups performed ethnic music concerts, dances, dramas, and other presentations. Many dignitaries and nearly 1,400 people attended the programme. On 29 April Srimat Swami Prabhanandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, gave a talk on Swamiji to about 700 persons, mostly students and teachers. **Delhi**: During 2012–13 the TB Clinic of the centre sensitized 8,772 students as well as their teachers in 26 schools through the health awareness programme 'Stop Tuberculosis'. Subsequently, 2,893 of these students participated in 51 poster-making sessions on 'Stop TB', and selected students participated in a seminar on the same theme on 22 March. A classical Bharatanatyam dance programme titled *Krishna Darshan* at the Azad Bhavan Auditorium of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, New Delhi, on 21 April, attended by about 300 persons. A programme of Abhang Bhajans and Namavalis at the ashrama on 14 April, attended by nearly 500 people. **Gretz** (France): A four-day programme comprising a seminar on 'Swami Vivekananda and His Universal Message', guided

meditation, yogasanas, and devotional music from 18 to 21 April, attended by about 80 persons on each day. **Hatamuniguda:** On 27 April Dr S C Jamir, governor of Odisha, unveiled the newly installed 12½-foot bronze statue of Swamiji in front of the ashrama's school building in the presence of many dignitaries, devotees, and students. Dr Jamir and Swami Gautamananda, President, Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, among others, addressed the public meeting held on this occasion; about 700 people attended the programme. **Jalpaiguri:** Cultural competitions on 25 April, in which around 1,000 students from 20 schools took part. **Limdi:** Religious discourses from 5 to 7 April. A six-day camp for school students from 25 to 30 April, attended by 85 students every day. **Mangalore:** Hindustani vocal music performance by a renowned artiste on 6 April, attended by 350 persons. **Mumbai:** A programme of devotional songs by eminent artistes on 5 April, attended by about 1,000 people. **Quilandy:** Three students' camps at Quilandy and one at Wayanad in April, in which 268 students participated. **Rahara:** Srimat Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated a seven-day celebration and the Vivekananda Mela (fair) on 30 March in the presence of Mr Altamas Kabir, chief justice of India, and several other dignitaries. A colourful procession with three Rathas (decorated vehicles) and more than 7,000 people circumambulated the entire town on 31 March. Swami Suhitananda, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, handed over prizes to the winners of the cultural competitions, in which 2,295 students of 68 schools and 11 orphanages had participated. More than 5,000 people attended the programmes comprising conventions, cultural events, and other activities every day from 30 March to 5 April. **Ranchi Morabadi:** Three district-level youth

conventions in April, in which 2,263 youths participated. **Salem:** Value education programmes for parents at the ashrama premises on 27 March and at a school in Namakkal district on 6 April; in all 108 parents attended the programmes. Orientation programme for auto-drivers on 21 April, in which 78 auto-drivers participated. **Swamiji's Ancestral House:** 21 lectures at different places in and around Kolkata between 23 February and 20 April, attended by about 10,000 people. **Tiruvalla:** Youth convention at Pathanamthitta on 13 April, attended by 96 youths. **Vadodara:** Value education programmes in five educational institutes of Gujarat in March and April, attended by nearly 600 students. Public meetings, meditation camp, religious discourses, and a musical story on Swamiji from 12 to 20 April—each programme attended by 150 to 200 persons—and musical performances on 21 and 22 April, attended by about 500 people.

News from Branch Centres

On 30 March Srimat Swami Prabhanandaji Maharaj inaugurated a LED screen at **Ramakrishna Math, Vadodara**, which had been installed to spread the message of Swamiji. On the same day he also inaugurated Ma Sarada Annakshetra at the ashrama, which will serve free noon meals to 150 poor people daily.

Sri Shivraj Patil, governor of Punjab, visited **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Chandigarh**, on 5 April and participated in its annual celebration.

Srimat Swami Prabhanandaji Maharaj inaugurated the renovated Swami Vivekananda Children's Library and Development Centre in the library building of **Ramakrishna Ashrama, Rajkot**, on 9 April.

Sri M K Narayanan, governor of West Bengal, visited **Ramakrishna Math, Kamarpukur**, and **Matri Mandir, Jayrambati**, on 11 April.



Consecration of the new temple at Washington, DC

The newly constructed temple, with a marble statue of Sri Ramakrishna, at the **Vedanta Centre of Greater Washington, DC (USA)**, was consecrated on 20 April, the sacred Ramanavami Day. About 450 devotees attended the programme. On this occasion a monastic conference was held at the centre on 19 April, in which 29 monks, nuns, and novices participated.

Achievements

The Junior Basic School (Unit 3) of **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Sarisha**, has been awarded the Nirmal Vidyalaya Puraskar for the year 2012–13 in recognition of its commendable efforts in advancing water sanitation and hygiene interventions organized by Sarva Shiksha Mission, South 24-Parganas, West Bengal. The award carries a citation, a trophy, and 5,000 rupees.

The outgoing class-10 students of the school at **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Malda**, secured 1st, 5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th ranks in the National Talent Search Examination (State Level) 2013, Government of West Bengal.

Relief

Distress Relief • The following centres distributed various items to needy people. **Baranagar Mission**: 30 saris and 20 dhotis on 2 April. **Khetri**: 24 sewing machines on 4 January. **Rahara**: 730 saris, 75 dhotis, 75 lungis, 150 children's garments, 685 mosquito nets, 300 bed sheets, 220 school bags, 117 l of coconut oil, and 24 kg milk powder on 30 March and 4 April. **Ramharipur**: 200 kg rice on 15 April.

Drought Relief • In the wake of severe drought in certain parts of Karnataka and Maharashtra, several centres supplied drinking water to affected families. **Shivanahalli** (Bengaluru) supplied 904,000 l to 9,465 people in 7 villages of Malur Taluk in Kolar district from 15 to 26 April. **Aurangabad** supplied 896,000 l to 3,850 people in 4 villages of Aurangabad district from 1 to 26 April. **Pune** supplied 1,176,000 l to 24,592 people in 15 villages of Ahmednagar district from 1 to 27 April.

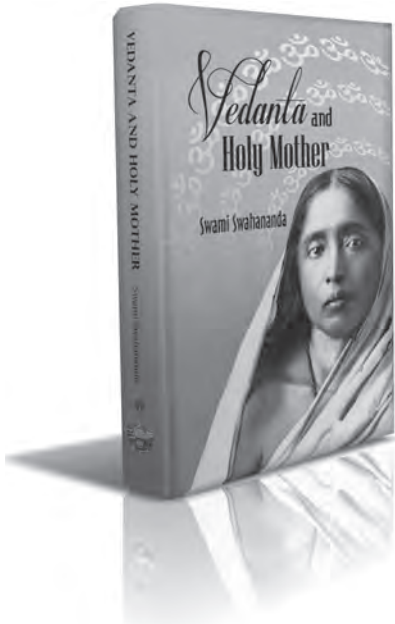
Economic Relief • **Rahara** centre distributed 15 rickshaws, 15 sewing machines, and 23 cycles to economically backward people on 30 March and 4 April.

Fire Relief • The following centres distributed various items among the families whose houses were gutted by fire. **Dinajpur** (Bangladesh): 139 kg rice, 50 jugs, 28 baskets, 31 saris, 42 chaddars, 28 mosquito nets, and other items to 42 families of Mohammadpur, Mitrabati and Karaigram villages in Thakurgaon district. **Silchar**: distributed 25 kg chira (rice flakes), 7 kg gur (molasses), 8 kg milk powder, 20 packets of biscuits, 15 plates, 12 saris, 8 dhotis, 15 blankets, and 10 mosquito nets to 10 families of the Shiva Colony in Silchar. **Sargachhi**: gave 325 kg chira, 90 kg gur, 23 kg biscuits, 50 kg salt, 398 saris, 59 dhotis, 199 lungis, 96 frocks, 22 salwar-kameez, 700 notebooks, and 300 pens on 9 and 13 April to 199 families of Hukohara and Jhaldia villages in Murshidabad district.

Hailstorm Relief • In the aftermath of a destructive hailstorm in Bankura district **Ramharipur** centre distributed 1,960 roof tiles and 198 asbestos sheets among 74 families of 6 villages in Bankura district from 22 to 27 April.

Vedanta and Holy Mother

—Swami Swahananda



This book, 'Vedanta and Holy Mother', has been compiled mostly from published articles in journals and books. These are a collection of self contained articles and not a planned book. Those who are interested in a particular topic and not its entire philosophy or background may find these separate treatments more useful. These topics had been dealt with separately as lectures, essays, television talks and University lectures. There will be repetitions of ideas and language.

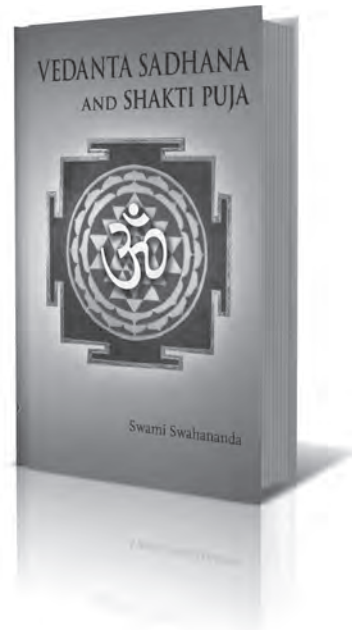
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Vedanta Sadhana and Shakti Puja

—Swami Swahananda

Swami Swahananda was a senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order and has spread the message of Vedanta in the west for many decades. This book is a collection of his writings and speeches compiled by his disciples and admirers. We are happy to bring this volume to the readers who will be benefited by the insight of the author.

Pages 336 | Price ₹ 70 | Packing & Postage: ₹ 40



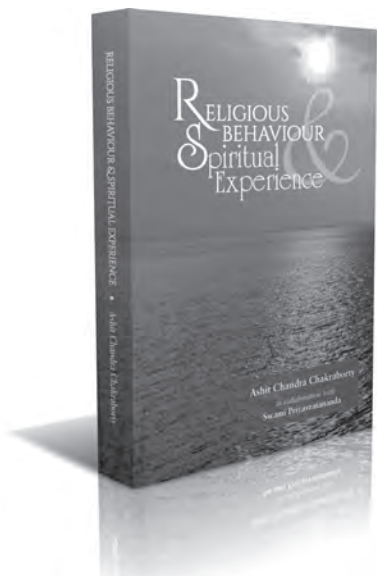
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Religious Behaviour & Spiritual Experience

—Asit Chandra Chakraborty
in collaboration with
Swami Priyavratanaanda



The religious have always intrigued the lay. Spiritual life and experience eludes ordinary understanding or so it seems. Senses fail to fathom spiritual truths. Science seems to be at loggerheads with spirituality. Is there any meeting ground? Can spiritual truths be investigated by a scientific mind using scientific techniques? Why do people take to spiritual life? Is there any scientific truth behind supra-normal experiences? These and other questions have been explored in this book.

Pages 340 | Price ₹ 100 | Packing & Postage: ₹ 35

Vivekananda in Pictures

Photographs remind us of personalities. Prophets have a striking personality which is reflected to some extent in their images. We are fortunate that we have many photographs of Swami Vivekananda, through which we can get a glimpse of his magnetic bearing. All his original photographs are in black and white. We have digitally re-mastered some of these photographs into colour. We are happy to present them in this book and are sure that they will be received well by his admirers. This book is being published on the occasion of the 150th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda.



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Phones: 91-33-22890898 / 22840210 / 22866483, Email: mail@advaitaashrama.org

A PLACE FOR PRAYER

Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Asansol, a unique soothing place in the industrial city of Asansol, commenced its journey in 1926. A boy's school was started in 1939, with the hostel facility from 1953. To cope with the expansion of the Ashrama activities and increasing number of students the Ashrama along with the School, was permanently shifted to its present 55 acre campus from its previous cramped location, in the year 2001. It runs at present a Secondary School (which is now one of the best in the entire state), a Vocational Training Centre (VTC), a Free Coaching Centre for underprivileged children with the supply of their educational needs, nutrition and medicines, a Charitable Dispensary (Allopathy & Homoeopathy), and a Public Library-cum-Reading Room. Under its influence, more than 25 centres (not affiliated with the Ramakrishna Mission) are engaged in various humanitarian services.

We are badly in need of a commodious Auditorium to hold our intended Cultural or Religious programmes, Seminars, and Conventions in a befitting way. A spacious Universal Prayer-cum-Meditation Hall is also required to meet the demand of the growing number of devotees and to provide a suitable serene ambience for Meditation and Pacification of Mind for the people of all faiths.

To make that vision true, in 2008, we started building one Universal Prayer-cum-Meditation Hall and Auditorium with an estimated cost of ₹ 5 Crore. The Auditorium will have 1100 seats and the Universal Prayer-cum-Meditation Hall would accommodate about 800 devotees.

The superstructure of the colossal two-storeyed building completed with an expenditure of about ₹ 3.11 Crore. For the finishing of this building ₹ 3.92 Crore is required. The cost escalates everyday and so we are anxious to complete the project at the earliest.

We fervently appeal to all of you, the generous admirers and devotees of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother and Swami Vivekananda, and well-wishing organizations, institutions, and individuals, to extend your helping hands to materialize this noble endeavour. Your valued contributions will help us to serve the society in a better way.

Cheque/ Demand Drafts may be drawn in favour of '*Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Asansol*' and should be sent to the below mentioned address. Your offering is exempted from Income Tax under



u/s 80G of Income-tax Act, 1961. You can donate online through RTGS/NEFT to our A/c No: 813787811, with Indian Bank, RKM Branch, Asansol, IFSC Code: IDIB000R083 (Please mention your postal address and PAN No through e-mail to us while donating online).

Swami Sukhananda
Secretary



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